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AND THE TROJAN HORSE by G. Wayman Jones

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The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse *and* The Black Bat's Dragon Trail

TWO CLASSIC ADVENTURES OF

THE BLACK BAT

by Norman Daniels and Norvell W. Page
writing as "G. Wayman Jones"

plus a new historical essay
by Will Murray

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THE BLACK BAT

Volume 6

Presenting TWO Complete Book-length novels from the files of Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime, as originally created by Norman Daniels and Leo Margulies.

Thrilling Tales and Features

THE BLACK BAT AND THE TROJAN HORSE
by Norman Daniels
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Men die on schedule when vicious foreign spies make a grim attack on our American defenses! Follow the Black Bat and his aides on a perilous trail as they challenge the might of a sinister alien power.

THE BELFRY by Will Murray 56

THE BLACK BAT'S DRAGON TRAIL
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A scourge of the underworld plays the role of hooded avenger fo voil a murder master's plans! Tony Quinn goes into action to protect war-torn China from the exploitation of a nefarious criminal who battens on disaster.

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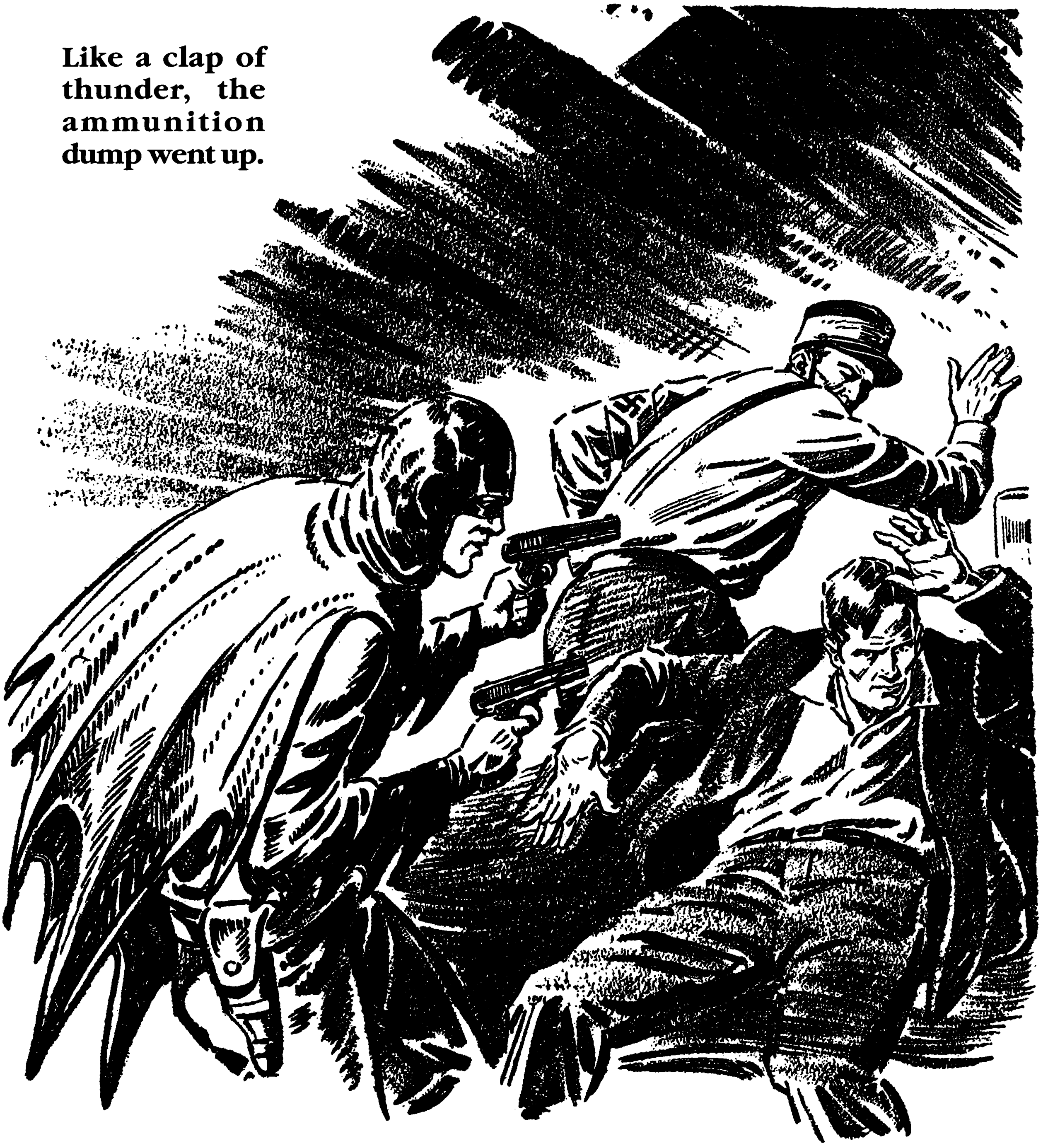
THE BLACK BAT



Like a clap of thunder, the ammunition dump went up.

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat's Triumph," "The Black Bat's Crusade," etc.

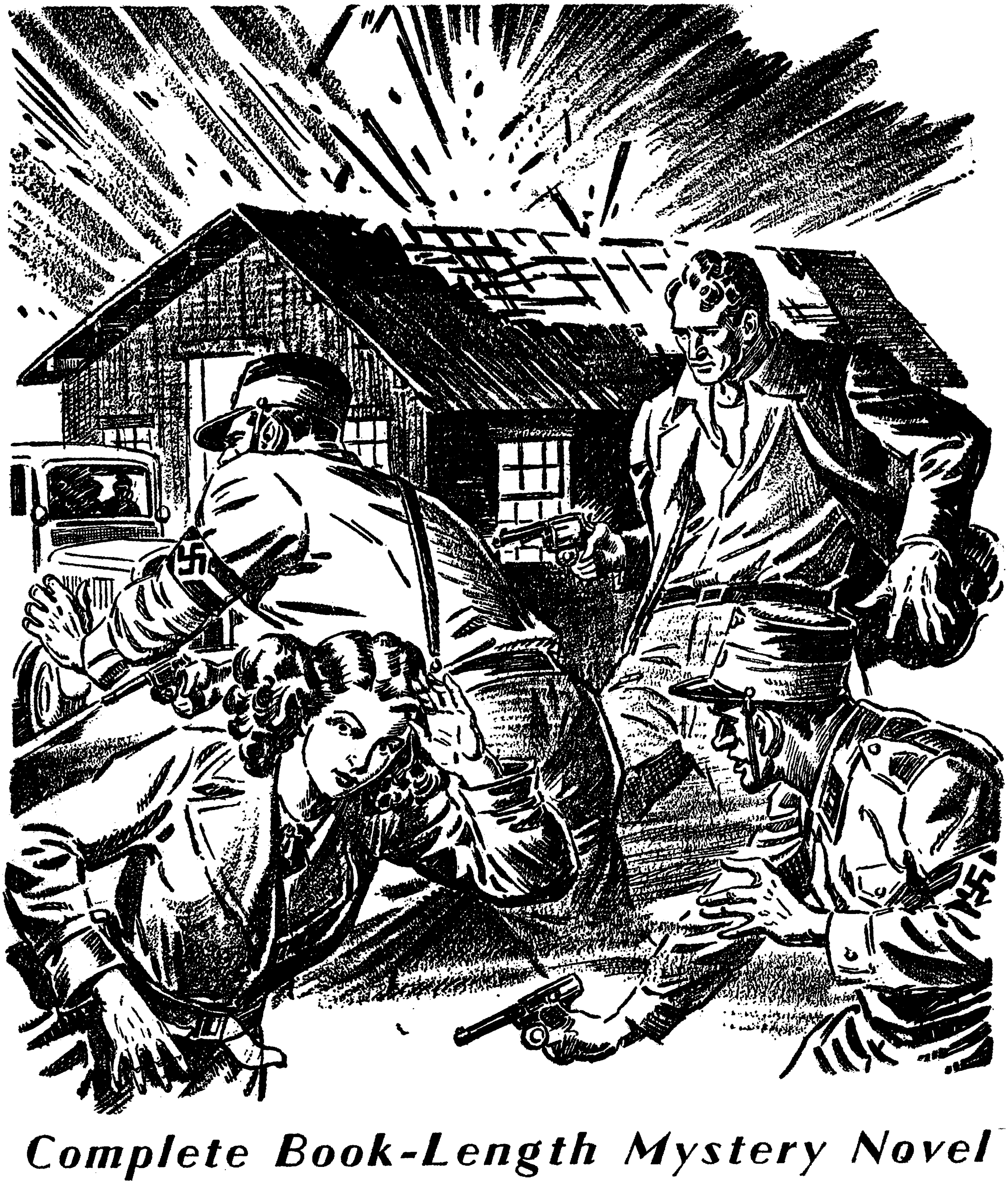
CHAPTER I

Freedom of Speech

THE MAN was a skinny, crafty-faced individual, utterly unprepossessing in his worn and dirty brown suit. But some strange whim of nature had blessed him with a ready tongue. He went into action first by striking up a conversation with a passerby, and his loud voice brought other listeners. They were mostly young men without jobs, who spent a great deal of their time watching the war bulletins in front of the newspaper office.

The stranger dropped his voice when policemen strolled by and his audience never grew to more than half a dozen. But from his lips dropped poison—the venom of a serpent coiled hidden in the grass,

AND THE TROJAN HORSE



A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

waiting to strike from ambush.

"So what happens?" he asked the group around him. "We grow up and we got no jobs. That's the trouble with this kind of government they call a democracy. They oughta make jobs for us, and pay us good, too. We're just as smart as the birds who make a million bucks while we don't get enough to eat. Now they're going to make us train and maybe fight for them.

"Why should we fight? So these damned millionaires can eat their caviar and drink champagne? Yeah, while we'll be lucky if we get beans. Any sucker who lugs a gun and fights for millionaires is crazy. There's a better living in Germany and in Italy today. That's where these rich guys work for people like us, see?"

A boy, no more than seventeen, elbowed his way closer.

"Mister, are you telling us not to fight if this country gets into war? Is that what you mean?"

"You bet, kid. That's just what I'm trying to drive home. I'm as broke as the rest of you fellows. I don't even know where I'm going to sleep tonight, or get my next meal. But pick up a gun and dodge bullets for a country that don't care? Not me! And you guys oughta get wise, too. Next thing you know, they'll heave what's left of you into a grave, like a lot of plowed-under cotton.

"Don't fight! Don't even work in munitions plants. Don't listen to the speeches of the war-mongers. All they want are profits from selling guns and bullets to shoot down other saps like us."

While the stranger talked and, to his credit, swayed the small group of young men, a seedy-looking coupé backed to the curb, almost close enough to knock the speaker off his feet. Knowing he held his audience, the speaker only glared at the driver of the car and kept on talking. He preached what amounted to revolution and backed it up with arguments that were corrupt, but nonetheless readily understandable to the young men gathered around him.

THE DOOR of the coupé opened. The whole left side of the car dipped, close to the gutter as its driver got out. He was a hulking brute of a man with fists as huge as boxing gloves. Sometime in the past, his nose had suffered a collision with an irresistible object, which had flattened the bridge. He had a wide, usually placid face, but now there were troubled wrinkles on his forehead.

As he stood listening to the speaker, those wrinkles grew deeper and deeper. Gradually, his eyes narrowed and his thick fingers worked convulsively. Finally, as if he could stand no more, the big man moved forward. With a sweep of his arm, he pushed some of the group aside and planted himself directly in front of the speaker.

"Listen, mister," he said slowly. "I ain't no college man, see? I don't know much either, but I don't like the way you're talkin'. There's a lot of trouble goin' on in the world and you ain't helping matters much. So why don't you close that trap of yours and beat it, huh?"

The speaker gave vent to a string of curses and shook his fist as close to the big man's face as he could reach.

"I will say what I like. This stupid country allows free speech. No one can stop me. Not you, nor the police, nor the Army, nor the Navy—"

"Yeah?" the big man growled. "Maybe not even the Marines, huh? But I can, you squawkin' skunk. One more yap outta you and I'll use you to clean up the sidewalk. You'll be the broom, see?"

"I shall have you arrested," the speaker yelled. "No one can talk to me this way. Find me a policeman, somebody!"

He couldn't say any more because one of those enormous fists shot out. The fingers seized his necktie and he felt himself being lifted completely off the sidewalk. He began flailing his arms and screaming for help. Those who had been listening to him backed away. They wanted no trouble with this giant who was doing exactly what they had inwardly wanted to do themselves.

The huge man suddenly turned his prisoner upside down, grabbed him by the ankles as if he were no more than a ventriloquist's dummy, and shook him hard. A stream of silver fell out of the speaker's pocket, then several other small objects, and finally a roll of bills fastened together. The silver clip dropped off as the money bounced on the sidewalk, and the bills fluttered around—five of them hundred-dollar bills, a dozen were fifties, and there were twenties, tens and fives in profusion.

"Hey!" one of the youths shouted. "That guy said he was out of a job like us. Look at the dough he's got! He was handing us a line, talking about millionaires, saying we shouldn't fight for them. He's a millionaire himself. Boy, look at that big guy mop the sidewalk with him."

"Yeah," another boy said coldly. "Serves him right. We were a bunch of saps for listening to him. I hope he gets his neck busted."

A POLICE whistle shrilled. Four patrolmen rushed up, and a sergeant joined them. He took one look at the big man and reached for his blackjack. But the big man ceased shaking his victim as the police closed in.

"Put him down, Atlas," the sergeant ordered. "Make one funny play and I'll slug you."

The big man still gripped his victim by one ankle. He held him over the gutter and let go. Then he spread his hands in a gesture of dismay.

"But look, Sarge, this guy was talkin' against the United States. He was sayin' it ain't no good and that nobody should fight for it. He said he'd rather live in Europe. Now I ain't a smart guy, but I don't like what he said, so I just figured I'd show him how I felt."

"That's right, Sergeant." Several of the youths gathered closer, "He was saying we shouldn't fight even if we're drafted. I felt like slugging him myself."

the Might of a Sinister Alien Power!

"Who are you?" the sergeant asked the big man.

"Butch—Butch O'Leary. I didn't mean no harm, but a guy can listen to just so much...."

"Hey," the sergeant yelled suddenly. "Grab that fifth columnist! He's crawling along the gutter to make a break for it."

Two patrolmen pounced on the orator and dragged him back. He drew himself up, glared at Butch O'Leary and tried to use the influence of his voice again.

"I am Hans Hofer, a citizen of the United States. I can say what I please, where I please. This ape assaulted me. I demand that he be arrested."

"Okay, sweetheart," the sergeant said. "Murphy, call the wagon. As for you, Mr. Hofer, you better come along, too. With my own eyes I saw you trying to kick that big guy. That amounts to assault, so you're pinched, too."

Ten minutes and six arguments later, a patrol wagon pulled up. Butch gulped as he looked at it, leaped when a patrolman touched his arm.

"Let's go, pal. What's the matter, don't you like to ride in the wagon? Say, I'll tell you what. You ride up front with the driver and everybody'll think you're a plainclothesman."

"Gosh, thanks!" Butch smiled for the first time. "But ain't that against the rules or somethin'?"

"Maybe it is. But if we have to pinch a guy like you, we do it polite. Anyway, that skinny mug is a dangerous guy. If we put you in back with him, he might get tough and hurt you. Get up on the front seat and don't argue."

A craning, shoving crowd had collected. The dispersing audience of the arrested speaker passed through the crush explaining what had happened. A low hum of angry voices made the sergeant look around worriedly. He hustled his prisoner to the back of the wagon.

"No!" Hofer screamed. "I will not ride in that thing like a common criminal. You cannot make me do this."

The sergeant didn't say a word. He merely grabbed Hofer by the back of the neck and the seat of the pants. Hofer came into violent contact with the front panel of the truck and began to blubber. As the wire doors closed and the wagon rolled away, derisive shouts followed it.

ONE HOUR later, Butch O'Leary faced a night court magistrate and tried to tell what had happened.

"I'm guilty, I guess, but I didn't slug him. I just kinda shook him a little. I don't like to hear guys saying this country ain't no good, Judge, and that's just what he was doin'. Maybe I shoulda minded my own business, but I ain't smart like you or everybody else in here. I ain't sorry for what I did and I won't promise not to do it again. So I guess maybe I oughta go to jail."

The judge adjusted his glasses, cleared his throat and looked questioningly at the sergeant who had made the arrest.

"Did you take the fingerprints of these two men? You did! Any record of that nature pertaining to Mr. Butch O'Leary is to be destroyed forthwith. He is not a criminal."

"Your Honor," Hofer shouted angrily. "My fingerprint records must also be destroyed. I am here as the complaining witness. I have my rights. It is not a crime to say what you think in this country. The Constitution guarantees me the right of saying what I like. I am a citizen...."

"Your fingerprint record and personal history," the judge interrupted, "are to be sent to Washington. I want to be certain that you are a citizen, as you claim, and that you have no criminal record. Until word is sent back, I hold you in ten thousand dollars bail, on the charge of felonious assault upon the person of one Butch O'Leary."

"Then you must hold him, too!" Hofer shrieked. "He is the guilty one. I am a peaceable citizen. He attacked me. I did not hit him."

"Butch O'Leary, step forward for sentence," the judge announced. "You have pleaded guilty. You had no legal right to strike or touch this man. It is the sentence of this court that you be fined one dollar—without costs—and the execution of the sentence is suspended. You are free to go."

Butch's wide face lit up. He stumbled to the bench, extended his vast hand to the judge and looked a little ashamed even though it was accepted.

"You," the judge said acidly, turning to Hofer, "claim to be a naturalized citizen. Which means that, without coercion on the part of anyone, you elected to adopt this nation as your own. Now, with four-fifths of the world gone mad, you preach the theory that the poor people should not fight for the benefit of the rich. But you had three thousand, four hundred and eighty dollars in cash in your pockets. That doesn't exactly make you a pauper and it refutes any theories you have to offer.

"You have been asked where you got that money and you refused to say. That is within your rights, but we're going to find out just where that money did come from. I have fined a man, given him a court record because he chose to act, instead of listening to your words as so many indifferent citizens do.

"When he laid hands on you, he committed a crime because anyone has the privilege of saying what he wishes in our country. Abroad, you would probably have been shot. Freedom of speech is one of the blessings of the United States, but let me tell you—it will not be blasphemed. You were clever in speaking to only a small group, as though it were nothing more than a friendly street conversation. It shows the way men like you operate.

"Fortunately, I can hold you for a short time, and I remand you to jail in default of bail. Take him away, Bailiff, and bring up some of those respectable drunks I see in the prisoners' cage. They'll make the atmosphere of the room smell sweet after what has just passed before the nose of this court."

CHAPTER II

Butch Has a Problem

BUTCH O'LEARY walked out of night court. Somebody had thrust a fat cigar between his teeth. He felt elated, and just a little proud. Yet deep within him lurked doubts. What would Tony Quinn think of this escapade? Quinn had given definite instruction that those who worked with him must keep out of trouble.

Butch was glad everything had happened too fast for the newspaper photographers. If they had taken his picture, it would have been catastrophic. He had to avoid the limelight as much as possible, for Butch O'Leary was one of the three living persons who worked with the eerie being known as the Black Bat.

Butch possessed no supreme confidence in his own powers of thinking. He could fight like a tiger and he possessed the strength of three ordinary men, but he needed guidance for his peace of mind. Therefore, instead of returning to his own modest boarding house room, he went immediately to an apartment house only a couple of blocks from where he lived. He rang the bell under the name card labeled "Carol Baldwin." She was another of the Black Bat's operatives.

Carol was an extraordinarily pretty girl and as clever as she was good looking. Blonde, with blue eyes and a trim figure, she exacted many admiring glances. As the Black Bat's trusted agent, she had use for her wits. Now they served her well as she listened to Butch's story.

"It was swell of you, Butch," she approved wholeheartedly. "That man deserved to be shaken up a bit. It's all over now, and you have nothing to worry about. They can't connect Butch O'Leary, the man who stood up for his country and Butch O'Leary, the agent of the Black Bat. Just forget all about it."

Butch dug into his pocket and drew out a thin strand of silvery chain. It was a bracelet of some sort, in the center of which was what seemed to be a flat locket.

"I been wonderin' about this," he said. "When I shook that guy, I musta loosened this and it fell to the sidewalk. I picked it up. Nobody saw me do it. So I pry open the funny lookin' thing, and look—it's got a paper inside, sure enough. What do you think of this, Carol?"

BUTCH'S FINGERS secured a leverage on the locket and forced it open. Carol removed the tiny bit of tissue paper, unfolded it and looked at the picture and the words printed beneath it. She arose abruptly and went into the bedroom for her hat.

"Butch, we're going to see the Black Bat now—at once! You may have uncovered something of great importance."

Carol and Butch left the apartment house, turned down a side street. Making certain that they were not observed, they quietly slipped through a gate into the spacious grounds behind Tony Quinn's house. They walked directly to a small garden house and entered it.

Butch opened a cleverly concealed trap door and helped Carol into a well-constructed tunnel. After following her in, he pulled down the trap door. They proceeded along the tunnel until they reached a ladder which brought them up to the white-tiled laboratory inside the home the Black Bat maintained as Tony Quinn.

By this means the Black Bat and his aides could come and go at will, without fear of detection. It had often provided Tony Quinn with a good alibi.

He was seated before the fireplace of his rich study when Carol and Butch were making their way along the tunnel. Dressed in tweeds and a smoking jacket, he held a cane between his knees as he stared blankly into space. For Tony Quinn was stone-blind, the surgeons had said, and with no hope of recovery. His face, particularly around the eyes, was so horribly seared that the scars made a mockery of his former handsome features.

Tony Quinn had been a crusading district attorney of a great city, a fearless man who had fought crime and criminals ruthlessly. One day, in open court, he was preparing to show evidence which would put a killer behind bars. Hirelings of that criminal sought to obliterate the evidence with a powerful acid. Tony Quinn had battled to prevent them, and in the fight the acid had been flung into his face. He was instantly blinded, scarred for the rest of his life when his burned flesh healed.

He had been a broken man, refusing to see anyone and becoming a virtual recluse. Though he was independently wealthy, all his money couldn't find an eye surgeon able to restore his sight.

Then, during a night of darkest despair, Carol Baldwin had come, blonde and lovely, to offer him the corneas of her dying father's eyes. A law officer, he had been shot by a bandit. She brought Quinn to a skillful and unknown country doctor, who performed the phenomenal operation—and Tony Quinn again could see and battle crime.

As his sight returned, Quinn discovered that he had been amply rewarded for his suffering in darkness. He was able to see in the dark almost as well as in daylight. Objects that were invisible to ordinary sight were as clear to him as if he carried a flashlight. He could even distinguish colors that were mere blots to other human beings. But besides that, his other senses had developed to an extraordinary extent while he was blind. His hearing had grown abnormally acute, his sense of touch extremely keen.

Thus had the Black Bat been born. When Quinn returned home, he kept the recovery of his sight a secret. He still pretended to be totally blind, for nobody could suspect a blind man of being the Black Bat. He assumed the name as a gesture of derision for those who were happy when the district attorney had become blind as a bat.

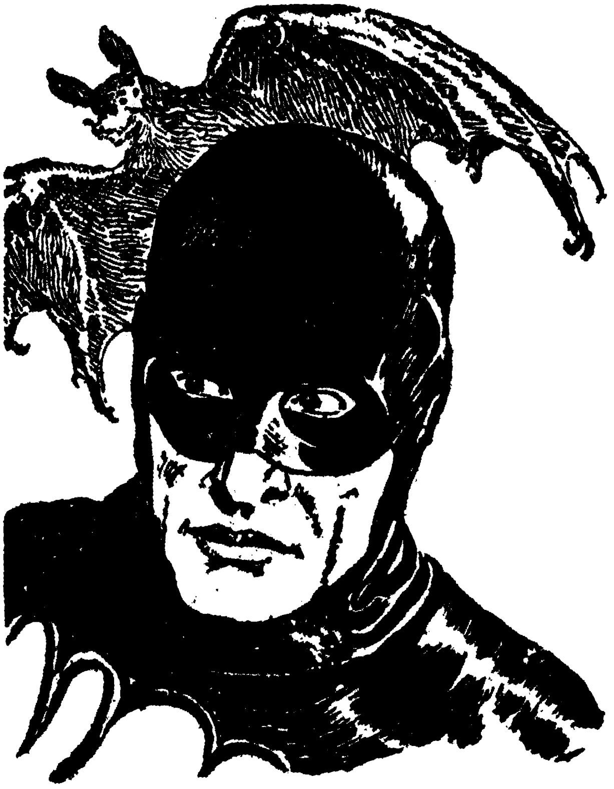
He sallied forth at night, garbed in a hood that covered his scarred face, and a cape fashioned like the ribbed wings of a bat. This symbol quickly terrorized the underworld enough to make them offer a huge price to anyone who could prove he killed the Black Bat.

Even the police were instructed to arrest him at the first opportunity, for some of the Black Bat's methods were not entirely legal. He had killed men, though only in self-defense. But when a man dies by violence, the police are required to arrest the killer. They had come close several times, particularly a detective-captain named McGrath. Because of his excitable nature, McGrath had sworn to run down the Black Bat no matter what the danger nor how much time it required.

A SLENDER, almost bald-headed man walked quietly into the study. Quinn didn't turn his head. He played the part of a blind man to the hilt, for there was no telling when someone might be looking in through a window. The newcomer was Silk Kirby, Tony Quinn's combination valet, butler and friend. Silk had once been a slick confidence man, but he had given up this life to aid Tony Quinn and the Black Bat. As smooth as his name, Silk could worm his way into the confidence of even a man who didn't trust himself.

Carrying several newspaper clippings in his hand, he walked over and stood by Quinn's side.

"I've clipped more of those articles you wanted, sir," he said quietly. "Seems as though your hunch was right. There are too many Army officials, Navy officers and even Marine Corps men dying by accident. Major Rolfe is the latest. He was retired about seven years ago from the Coast Guard. Night before last, he was attacked by three or four criminals who wanted to rob him. In the scuffle he received a broken head and died instantly."



THE BLACK BAT

"Before Major Rolfe, there were Captain Nelson, Colonel Hickman, Lieutenant-commander Hall," Quinn said thoughtfully. "Rolfe makes the toll four, Silk. All of these victims were retired military men, specialists in their own fields, mostly defense. In case of war, they would become invaluable, and now they're dead.

"Two were killed by criminal violence, and in each case it seemed as though robbers had murdered them for their possessions. The other two died as the result of auto accidents. I don't like it. The police and the Federal authorities haven't become suspicious yet, but to me those four deaths came too close to be coincidental. I think those men were murdered."

"Yes, sir," Silk agreed. "So do I, but how can we prove it if the police see nothing suspicious in their deaths? Retired men aren't expected to live long. Because of their advanced age, they are more prone to accidents and to the results of injuries imposed by robbers."

Quinn suddenly made a sharp yet almost imperceptible motion for silence.

"Silk, there's someone in the laboratory! Pull down the window shades quickly."

Silk obeyed the order. Quinn arose and thrust his cane under one arm. Walking swiftly to one wall, he opened a secret door by means of a hidden control. Silk followed him into the spacious room and the door closed behind them. Tony Quinn smiled happily into Carol's eyes and then noticed that hers were serious. Butch, too, seemed worried.

"Something has happened," Carol said. "Not about the Black Bat, or you, Tony. Butch happened to overhear some fifth columnist making a speech about pacifism and revolution. He didn't like it so he manhandled this person. Butch was arrested along with the orator. The judge practically praised Butch in open court and let him go. The speechmaker is being held temporarily."

"Good work, Butch," Quinn said. "I wish I'd been there to help you. There are too many of those subversive elements active right now. I hope you satisfied that sadistic urge you possess."

Butch grinned. "I dunno what sadistic means, Boss, but I sure tossed the guy around till his teeth clicked. I made a sucker out of him, all right. He'd been tellin' everybody he was poor and not workin', but three thousand bucks fell outta his pocket. And I kinda got to like cops. They even let me ride on the front seat of the patrol wagon—and what do you think? I blew the siren all the way to the station house!"

"That's nice," Quinn said and faced Carol. "But what has that to do with me?"

CAROL UNFOLDED her hand and showed the wristlet of silvery metal.

"In the scuffle, Butch must have broken the chain of this bracelet, Tony. It has a locket attached. Remember telling me how suspicious you were of several deaths recently, of ex-Army and Navy officers? Take a look at this."

Quinn took the folded piece of paper. When he spread it out on the laboratory bench, he gave a sharp explanation. He bent closer and studied the paper intently. The picture printed on it was easily recognizable as the well-known features of Lieutenant-colonel Catlin. Until his retirement five years before, Catlin had been one of the most able officers attached to the Chemical Warfare Service.

Below the picture, words were printed in extremely fine type. Cryptically they related that Lieutenant-colonel Catlin was in the habit of dining at the Army and Navy Officers' Club each Tuesday night. He attended all piano concerts that were available. He lived in a suite which had the stairway running close to it, and he retired promptly at midnight. According to this document, he was in the habit of walking through parks, even at night. He drank sparingly and made few friends because of his quiet nature.

"Explicit, to say the least," Tony Quinn remarked. "Now look here, all of you. This little record was printed on a hand press, judging by the smudges. It means that a limited number of copies have been circulated. I believe that the men who were given these copies were instructed to kill Colonel Catlin at some time when conditions favored the murder. That's why the habits of Catlin were so carefully outlined. We've got to act—this time, not against crooks and ordinary killers, but against a Trojan Horse!"

"Yuh mean one of them things the Nazis beat Norway with?" Butch asked. "That's a wooden horse, ain't it?"

"It was a wooden horse in the days when it originated," Tony Quinn answered. "Now it has changed its characteristics to those of a slimy serpent that burrows underground and occasionally raises its head to strike. When the opportune moment comes, it will sneak out of its hole and create havoc. Before that day arrives, it must be crushed underfoot like the crawling thing it is."

"Show me where I can put my foot on it!" Butch howled furiously. "Just show me."

Tony Quinn leaned back on the high stool in front of the bench.

"But it's not as easy as that. Foreign agents have been living here for years, plotting and planning for just this moment. They are all around us, some of them in high offices. Our job is to rout out as many as possible. Here's our course of action. Butch, I want you to go back to the police station and tell them you're sorry about what happened, that maybe this man you threw around isn't as bad as he seems to be. Ask to see him. He won't be there, for the forces behind him will have furnished bail by now.

"Find out who posted the bail. Find out, if you can, all the facts contained in his record. Determine the name of his attorney, because it would take a clever one to get him out if he is gone. Then report to Carol."

"Do I get in on this, sir?" Silk asked with restrained eagerness.

"When Butch gets his information, it's your turn," Tony Quinn said.

"You will watch the man, find out whom he contacts. Carol, you are to stand by your phone for the present. I'm going to see Colonel Catlin. Perhaps he knows some reason why these spies are trying to kill off the ex-service men. Silk, get out my paraphernalia. The Black Bat will spread his wings..."

CHAPTER III

Policy of Ruthlessness

JUST BEFORE he donned the robe and hood of the Black Bat, Tony Quinn made a neat parcel of certain instruments he thought would be necessary. Fighting spies that would resort to Trojan Horse activities required the same kind of stealth they used. The Black Bat intended to work against them with their own brand of ruthlessness and slyness.

He put two loaded automatics into special holsters on his person, removed the hood temporarily and replaced it with a wide-brimmed hat. Whenever the Black Bat worked more or less openly, he had to shield his features as well as he could. Those hideous scars around his eyes revealed his identity with which practically every police officer in the city was familiar.

Carol put a hand on his shoulder and looked anxiously into his eyes.

"Tony, this is probably the most dangerous job you've ever undertaken. Ordinary thugs and killers aren't as clever. They don't have the tremendous resources behind them, nor the number of men a spy ring can control. Please be careful—for my sake. I know just how necessary this work is, and I hope I get into it actively, too. But there's so much danger...."

"In a way," Tony Quinn admitted slowly. "But remember that these rats will be just as afraid of me as I'll probably be of them. If I can, I'll put them on the defensive, make them look to their own wits. If it's necessary, I'll wear them down, one by one. This is a game without mercy. They'll certainly extend none and I'm not inclined to be soft-hearted with termites who undermined so many European democracies by boring from below—and above. Perhaps by morning I'll know more about what we face. Meanwhile, we can't let them get to Colonel Catlin. At exactly nine o'clock, you are to phone Catlin's apartment."

Tony Quinn dropped into the tunnel and made his way to the garden house. Within a few seconds, he was seated behind the wheel of Butch's old coupé. This car was something like a Q-Boat, for though it looked like a wreck, there was plenty of speed in her smoothly running motor. Recently, the Black Bat had installed cleverly hidden compartments which held a rifle with telescopic sights and a submachine gun with plenty of ammunition.

He wondered now, as he drove toward the apartment house where Colonel Catlin lived, if some premonition had caused him to make those arrangements. Dealing with Trojan Horse activities might easily require the use of fast-firing automatic rifles or some careful sniping with the assistance of telescopic sights.

It was blindingly dark in the vicinity of the colonel's home. High, heavily branched shade trees gave the street a gloomy touch, but for the Black Bat this was perfect. He parked the car, faded into the darkness of an adjoining building and drew on his hood. Under one arm he carried the package he had made up in the laboratory

The Black Bat strode rapidly through the night. An ordinary man pursuing this particular course would have stumbled over an oil tank intake that jutted out of the ground. But the Black Bat saw it as plainly as though it were bathed in sunlight. Everything which would have been an obstacle to any other person was easily avoided by the Black Bat.

HE REACHED the rear of the apartment house, which was not a large one. There were no lights in the cellar, indicating that the superintendent was not on duty all the time. This exactly suited the Black Bat's plans. He slipped up to the basement door, examined the lock in the intense darkness and then inserted a key he selected from the ring he carried. The lock slid back on the first attempt.

He slipped into the cellar, closed the door and quietly placed an empty pail about a foot away from it. If anyone tried to sneak in, there would be a terrific clatter.

The Black Bat searched through the gloom of the cellar until he spotted the telephone system. Striding to it, he examined the tiny identifying tags hooked to the various wires from the different apartments. Since he had looked up Colonel Catlin's phone number, he found the proper wire in less than a minute. Swiftly he unwrapped his package, revealing a compact device for tapping wires. He hooked this up, found an old chair and sat down.

From time to time, he glanced at his wristwatch. When the hands were almost on the hour, he finally heard a buzz. Colonel Catlin's booming voice answered. The Black Bat smiled contentedly, for the caller was Carol, pretending that she had obtained the wrong number. The Black Bat knew now that Catlin was home and that his wire was successfully tapped. If Catlin was lured anywhere, the Black Bat would know that, too.

The spy ring was bound to strike against him soon. Probably the man Butch had mussed up was assigned to this work, if he had obtained his freedom. They would, of course, want to make it seem like an accident, and therefore the Black Bat saw little danger of any attempt at murder while Catlin was home. A hit-and-run driver, or a band of fake robbers who slugged their victim too hard—that would be the best means of accomplishing their designs.

Thirty minutes crawled by before the line buzzed again. The Black Bat listened intently.

"Colonel," the caller said, "this is Anton Morino. I must see you on a matter of vital importance. I cannot leave my home, nor can I explain over the phone. Will you come out here, please? Believe me, I wouldn't call if this were not an extremely serious matter. And please tell no one I called."

"Why, of course I'll come, Anton," Colonel Catlin said. "If I can help you in any way at all, don't hesitate to ask me. Where do you live?"

The man called Anton Morino gave specific directions, which Catlin had to write down to remember. They involved many turns at certain streets. Morino was giving anything but idle directions. This was a trap—a death trap for Catlin! If he followed that route, as he certainly would, death would be waiting somewhere along the roads!

The Black Bat quickly unhooked his instrument and returned to where his car was parked.

Five minutes later, Catlin hurriedly emerged. He crossed the street, backed his car out of a garage and headed north. The Black Bat followed, far enough behind to avoid detection, yet close enough to act quickly when things would start happening. Exactly how the killers would operate he didn't know. Most of the section Catlin had been told to traverse was unfrequented. Shots could be fired or even a bomb thrown. But the Black Bat doubted that the killers would resort to such obvious means.

THE CHASE led to the outskirts of the city. Carefully as the Black Bat had watched before, now he searched everything ahead with his incredible eyes. He saw an intersection and—what an ordinary man wouldn't see—a car parked at the junction of each cross artery. Instantly, the Black Bat stamped heavily on the gas pedal, making it hit the floor. The old car spurted forward.

But Catlin had already reached the intersection. As he crossed it, both cars shot out. Catlin must have seen one of them coming, for he yanked the wheel hard, veering to the right. The other car was coming from that direction. There was a deafening crash of smashed metal, splintered glass and exploding tires.

The Black Bat was traveling without lights, so he knew his car wouldn't be seen in the intense darkness. Besides, the killers had selected a spot where there would be little traffic. They didn't want to be found at their bloody work.

As the Black Bat turned off the road, he saw four men emerge from the two heavy sedans. One held a short length of iron pipe. Rushing up to Catlin's sedan, they pulled open the battered door and reached in to yank Catlin out. After they stretched him alongside the wreck, three of the men drew back. The actual killer raised the short iron bar. His lips parted in a snarl of hatred as his breath came in savage hisses—until he stopped breathing.

From the darkness beside the road, a jet of flame and the roar of a gun startled the killers. The man with the iron pipe moaned and collapsed across Catlin's sprawled form. The other three whipped out guns and started shooting in the direction of the gun flame. But as the Black Bat pulled the trigger of his weapon, he tensed, moved fast. Every bullet of the spies missed him by yards. They couldn't see him, but they could not know that they presented perfect targets to the super-sensitive eyes of the Black Bat.

One leaped toward Catlin and aimed his gun at the helpless man's head. But he did not shoot. He was dead before he had finished raising his gun.

The other two gave a single bleat of alarm and raced for their undamaged car. As they got in, three bullets smashed through the windows. The whine and crash only served to lend wings to their flight. The car started off with a grinding of hastily shifted gears. Carefully the Black Bat steadied his gun on one arm and sent another slug through the rear window. It had shatter-proof glass, but the Black Bat was using steel-jacketed, high-powered forty-fives in this fight. He was answering terrorism with ruthlessness.

The sedan disappeared into the night while the Black Bat ran over to Catlin. Brutally he hauled the dead spy off, and gently raised the colonel's head. Catlin opened his eyes and stared blankly. He could just make out the outline of the hooded head, though the Black Bat could see every line of his pain-contorted face.

"DON'T BE alarmed," the Black Bat said softly. "You have not been badly hurt. The accident knocked you out and a quartet of playboys tried to make a real job of it by bashing your head in or putting a slug through it. The two men who actually tried to wipe you off the face of the Earth were killed. I had to shoot them to save you."

"But I don't understand," Catlin protested weakly. "Please help me up. I—I feel fairly strong now. You killed these two men because they were trying to murder me? Nonsense! Who would want to kill me? I haven't an enemy in the world."

The Black Bat laughed without mirth.

"I'm sorry to contradict you, Colonel. You have several million enemies. Two are dead, but two others got away. They may get help and return. Lean on me, and don't be afraid of me because of the outfit I'm wearing."

"I'm not," Catlin answered. "I know you are the Black Bat and that you saved my life. But why in the world should anybody want to kill me?"

"I'll explain later," the Black Bat said.

He helped Catlin into his old coupé and then ran back to where the two spies lay dead. This was one of the few times that there was no remorse in the Black Bat's heart. He had been forced to kill before. More than once his victim had been some wild-eyed crook who, with a different childhood environment, might not have turned to crime. That kind the Black Bat had never wanted to destroy. But these two men—spies and saboteurs who lived for the day when they might hurl destruction on the entire nation—their deaths didn't bother his conscience.

He knelt beside them. In the center of their foreheads he pasted stickers fashioned after the image of a bat in flight, with wings outspread, dark and mysterious. Then he returned to the coupé and drove several miles away.

CHAPTER IV

Human Target

PARKING IN a dark spot, the Black Bat shut off the motor and extracted a pack of cigarettes from a pocket beneath his robe.

He handed one to Catlin, lit it and then touched flame to his own. In the glare of the match Catlin saw sharp, cold eyes gleaming from behind the mask. He shivered, praying that he would never be on the wrong side of the game with the Black Bat hunting him down.

"You've been to several military funerals lately, eh, Colonel?"

Catlin frowned. "Why, yes. But what has that to do with a plot to murder me?"

"The men whose funerals you attended also thought they had no enemies, but they were murdered. I can't prove that, of course, yet I know it to be true. By a stroke of good fortune, I discovered you were on the list and I took steps to prevent your murder. Enemies, Colonel? You have millions of them! This nation is rearming. We don't want war, but we want to be ready for it if it comes to our shores.

"Besides our defense preparations, we're supplying the nations that hate and distrust the explosive forces of might. We're trying to keep the world a decent place to live in. At this moment, we're free men, and we'll fight to maintain that freedom. But we're being fought, too, by shadowy figures who work in the dark with underhanded methods.

"Other nations have had tragic experiences with the Trojan Horse, the spies who make countries defenseless by conflicting and sabotaging preparations. Those men we must stop."

"Yes, of course," Catlin agreed. "But I still don't see how I'm involved."

"You're in it up to your ears. We're training men, thousands upon thousands of them. More are being brought into the service every day. They need instruction from experienced men to teach them how to fight. If the spies can prevent that, it will be as great a disaster as the sinking of our battleships or the blowing up of our munitions factories. You and those four officers who were murdered—all of you were retired, but you can still be called to active service at any time.

"That call must be coming soon or those spies wouldn't act so quickly. I'm betting everything on the fact that Washington intends to recall you experts to train the green troops. We are under-officered and that condition can be remedied only by having men like you train your successors. The spies want to prevent that and they are willing to resort to murder to do it. Now can you see that there are enemies who can't allow your existence?"

CATLIN WIPED his sweating forehead, took an immense drag on his cigarette.

"Of course I see, and I'm grateful that you showed me the light. Yes, I am about to be called back, just as you say. Those devils certainly are working cleverly. They intend to murder us old men, and we are easy prey. Then, when our ranks are so badly depleted, they'll tackle the younger officers. No one will realize what is happening till it's too late. We'll make them know! Take me home. I'm going to call Washington and, if you don't mind, I'll mention your name."

"You have my permission," the Black Bat said. "I want those slinking spies to know I'm fighting them. That's why I left souvenirs on the two men I killed. But before we start back, I want to know about this Anton Morino who lured you into this trap with a phone call."

"Anton?" Catlin gasped. "Great heavens, he can't be involved! That isn't possible. He hates everything those spies represent. He hates them with all the malevolence of a man who has actually seen their work of destruction. Anton Morino came here from Tyrolean Austria, just after Hitler invaded it. He had to flee for his life."

The Black Bat started his car and pulled onto the road.

"Perhaps, Colonel. Norway accepted many people like that—men who presumably fled from the Nazi wrath. And what happened? Those the Norwegians befriended turned traitor, dug knives into their backs. They were sent to smooth and prepare a field of action for armed forces that would eventually arrive.

"Don't forget that those monsters don't adhere to the rules of the game—only when someone else pulls the same trick on them. Then they squawk to high heaven and protest that they've been fouled. Anton Morino may be wholly innocent, but until I'm convinced, he stays on my list of suspects. I must insist that you do not let him know what happened."

BUTCH O'LEARY, in response to the Black Bat's orders, paid a short visit to Police Headquarters and then phoned Carol's apartment.

"They thought I was nuts because I wanted to tell that bum I was sorry. But anyhow he's free. Guy named Anton Morino put up ten grand in cash and the bum walked out. What do I do now?"

"Go back to your room and wait," Carol said.

"I'll tell Silk what happened."

Silk Kirby was seated before a mirror in one of the upstairs rooms when the phone rang. His appearance was undergoing a radical change. In the past, Silk had learned to adapt himself to two disguises that used to be of great assistance when he pried spare cash from the bankrolls of people with more larceny than honesty in their hearts. Now, as the Black Bat's right-hand man, these disguises often proved invaluable. There could be no connection between the operation of the Black Bat's aide and Silk Kirby, or the whole secret might be exposed. Silk was becoming almost as well-known as his master.

He widened his face, changed the contour of his lips and created a couple of sacks under his eyes. A wig, cleverly fastened to his bald pate, made him look years younger.

Silk answered the phone, using the upstairs connection. He listened to Carol's instruction, then hung up. Hastily he completed his disguise with a suit of clothes that Silk Kirby, gentleman's gentleman, would never have worn even to a masquerade.

He locked the house from the inside, slipped out through the tunnel and hailed a taxi two blocks from the house. He had already checked Anton Morino's address, and before long he was studying the place from a safe distance.

It was an old, rambling house, without close neighbors and well isolated from the road by big trees and plenty of shrubbery. Silk was grateful for the protection that these natural barriers offered. He sneaked into the grounds, fumbled around and picked up a small stone, which he threw toward the back of the house. When no dogs set up a clamor, he breathed a sigh of genuine relief.

Silk knew plenty of ways of entering a house without those inside being aware. Many of his former associates had been crooks of high caliber—in their professions, if not in their characters. When he crept to the rear of the house, he blinked in amazement. Four big cars were parked in one of the gloomier spots, yet the house itself was darkened.

Silk straightened up from a crouching position just beneath a window He failed to raise it, and resorted to the use of a thin piece of metal that he carried on these expeditions. Forcing back the latch successfully, he clambered through the open window and stood listening.

He could hear muffled voices that seemed to come from near the floor, directly across the room. Silk stepped forward warily, moving his hand cautiously in front of him to locate furniture. If he stumbled now, there was no telling what the result might be. He found that the voices came from an old-fashioned hot air vent. Apparently this house was no more up-to-date than its outward appearance suggested. Silk knelt on the floor and listened.

A MAN with a loud, authoritative voice was speaking. With each word, Silk's blood ran one degree colder. The Black Bat's hunch had certainly paid off! This must be one of the chief hideaways of the spy ring.

"And so," the voice went on, "we are this day almost prepared. Yet we must not relax in our vigilance, nor in our constant training. You men gathered here have shown poor results in target practice. When the time comes, I will need men who can shoot fast and straight. Therefore, you will report to Hans at the old farm, where no one can hear your practice shots. Prepare yourselves, my lieutenants, for our day is coming soon!

"You will remain at the farm until your aim is true and your firing rapid. Then, and only then, will you be ready. We are strong, yes, but do not let these Americans fool you by their apparent lassitude. Once aroused, they will fight back like demons. We must arrange it so they will have no leaders. Even now we are in the process of wiping out another man who might prove harmful to our mission. He is number five, but there will be more—many more—and these fools here will go on placidly, never suspecting murder."

"That is right," another voice broke in. "I, Erik Wolfram, say it is so. You have been sent here from the mighty Gestapo to direct our efforts. We are cleverer than any of the fools who oppose us. Even though we have never seen you, our Director, we obey you implicitly. Our cause cannot fail."

"Good," the booming voice approved. "It is well. Now you will stand at attention. About-face, all of you. Do not turn back for five minutes. Any further orders will come over the usual channels. You have but to keep your eyes open."

A moment later Silk heard a car door slam shut. He scurried across the floor toward the window. Undoubtedly the man leaving the place was the spy leader, unknown even to his own men. Silk knew that if he could seize and identify him, half the battle would be won. But as he reached the window, a car flashed by, turned into the street and vanished.

He cursed softly and determined to satisfy his frustration by exposing these rats who characteristically used a cellar as their meeting place. The man they called their Director had spoken of a target range where his legions could learn how to kill effectively. More than anything else, he had to find the location of that farm.

Silk looked around for a hiding place, for the men in the cellar would be coming up soon. He headed toward the hallway, moving with absolute silence. He was halfway down the hall when the front door opened and the hall lights were turned on. Silk's hand darted toward the gun in his pocket. But he was a fraction of a second too slow.

One of the two men in the hall had him covered.

"What's the idea of using a gun, copper?" Silk snarled, though the men wore civilian clothes. "I ain't robbin' the joint. I'm just lookin' for a place to hole up for the night."

Silk's voice attracted those in the cellar. He swallowed with difficulty when he counted eleven burly men as they filed into the spacious hallway.

"HOLY SMOKE!" Silk carried on his act. "I figured this joint was vacant. Say, all you mugs can't be cops. What is this—a stag party?"

A broad-shouldered man moved ominously toward Silk. When he spoke, his voice identified him as Erik Wolfram.

"Who are you? What are you doing in this house? How long have you been here?"

Silk jerked his head in the direction of the living room.

"I just opened a window about a minute ago and came in. I'm on the lam. The cops are after me and I figured this was one swell spot to hide. So—"

"He lies," one of the men ground out. "A minute ago, we stood at attention as our Director's car left here. We turned our backs on it according to orders. We therefore faced the house, and we did not see this man going through any window. He is a spy—an accursed Government-man!"

Silk started forward until a gun, pressed against his chest, stopped him.

"I don't know what kind of an outfit I ran into," he snapped, "but don't call me no G-man. I hate their guts. Search me if you want to. I'm heeled, but you won't find nothing that'll make you think I'm a G-man or any other kind of a cop. You mugs got me all wrong."

One of the two men who had entered through the front door departed after whispering to Wolfram. When he returned, he carried a corpse over his shoulder. He dropped it and went out after the second body. As the dead men were turned on their backs, Silk gave an involuntary start. Between the eyes of each man was pasted a Black Bat sticker!

"So, perhaps you are not of the police," Wolfram snarled. "But those two men belonged to my organization, and the man who killed them branded his work. We all have heard of the Black Bat. You are the Black Bat!"

"Me?" Silk howled. "Say, if that guy ever caught up with me, I'd be laying there right between your two boys. Listen, if the Black Bat is on your trail, run for cover. I'm telling you he's poison."

Wolfram allowed an enigmatic smile to cross his face.

"But perhaps I have the antidote for that poison, eh? You are the Black Bat. You killed my men and spoiled certain plans of mine. Somehow, you learned of this place and sneaked in to watch and listen. But you will never profit by it. A short time ago, we received orders to improve our shooting. Even now, we are ready to go to a certain spot where we may shoot as often as we like, without interference. Yet we were desolate because we would have nothing but inanimate targets to shoot at.

"Now all that is changed. We have you—the Black Bat! We can indeed become proficient with you standing before us as a target. You will not mind a little fun like that, eh?"

Silk's eyes flashed across the group of sinisterly grinning killers. Suddenly, he lunged forward, slapping down Wolfram's gun as he did so. He managed to bury one fist into Wolfram's stomach and another in a blow that glanced off his cheek. The rest of the mob closed in, eager for blood.

Half a dozen pistol butts slashed at Silk, and most of them collided with his head.

He fell to one knee, wound his arms around the legs of the nearest man and pulled him to the floor. Then a savage tattoo of gun butts all but split his skull apart. He fell face forward and lay utterly still.

CHAPTER V

Desperation

SILK AWOKE to the pitching of a car traveling over a rough road. He groaned and tried to move, but his hands and legs were firmly tied. When he attempted to open his mouth, he found that a gag choked back everything more articulate than a groan. A hefty foot struck him on the back of the neck, forced his face into the filthy carpet on the floor. He had to stay that way, half strangling, until the car finally stopped. Then the foot was removed.

Before Silk could even gain a normal breath, his ankles were grabbed and he was dragged out of the car. His head struck the running board so hard that he almost lapsed back into unconsciousness. Bitterly he wished that had happened. It might have lasted long enough to spare him the terror of the grisly end they planned for him.

Two other cars without lights pulled up, and laughing, highly elated men clambered out. Silk was dragged on his back to an old barn, where his legs were dropped. Two men stood guard over him while the others disappeared into the house. For a few moments there was nothing but silence, until the frogs in some nearby swamp lost their sudden fear. Silk shuddered. That was where they would throw what was left of him. In this forsaken spot, his body would never be found.

At last the men filed out again. Silk was hoisted to his feet and the rope around his ankles severed.

The gag was also removed before Wolfram confronted him.

"This," he waved an arm expansively, "is theoretically the property of the Fatherland, for it was bought with our money. Here, on the soil of our real country, we accuse you of being a spy. The sentence is death by gunfire—immediately! Walk ahead of me to that tree, the one near the foot of that hill."

Silk fought down his impulse to shudder. He was going to die, but he would not give these murderers the pleasure of seeing a man yap and beg to save his life. He knew that was what they were anticipating, because genuine disappointment showed in Wolfram's eyes.

"Well, thanks for the fast trail, anyway," Silk grunted. "It was streamlined, all right, but you went too quick for justice to catch up. It doesn't matter. I'll be seeing all of you when the Black Bat goes to town. You can't laugh him off, Nazi. He just doesn't scare. Let's go. You boys want your fun, and I wouldn't spoil...."

Wolfram struck viciously, a backhand blow across the mouth.

"You will not speak those brave words when we begin shooting. How can the Black Bat harm us after we kill him? You are the Black Bat, so what is the use of pretending? Walk before me. The slightest trick will mean a bullet through your leg."

Two men seized Silk's arms, half carried, half dragged him toward the tree. He closed his eyes in misery as he stumbled along. Not only had he sacrificed his own life, but he had failed the Black Bat as well! The only comfort he could find was the two Black Bat stickers that had been pasted to the foreheads of Wolfram's men. The Black Bat had already collected a fifty percent profit on what was going to happen now.

THEY lashed Silk to the tree. A car was driven close enough for the high beam of its headlights to make Silk close his eyes wearily.

"So, it is ready," Wolfram gloated. "We are miles from the nearest dwelling, still farther from any highway. There is no one to hear our shots nor the screams of the spy. Aim for the legs and arms first. We must learn to cripple as well as kill. There may be some we shall wish to take alive, eh? Max, you caught this man. Your reward is that you may have the first shot. Aim well, for the right arm."

Max bared his teeth in a murderous smile as he strode forward importantly. He cocked his revolver and spread his big feet apart to balance himself. Raising the pistol, he sighted Silk's right shoulder along the barrel. A hush fell over the others who waited their turns. This was a supreme moment in their lives. Before their eyes, a man was to die.

Silk didn't brace himself for the impact of the first slug, nor even open his eyes. Nothing seemed to matter now. But when he heard a shot, his eyes widened involuntarily. He waited for the terrific blow and agonizing heat of a bullet smashing through his body. But he had not been hit! Instead, Max was slowly rocking back and forth, the weapon sagging in his hand. Even through the blinding glare of headlights, Silk could see the bluish hole directly through the forehead of the ex-gunner.

A man shouted a hoarse Teutonic curse, ran frenziedly to the still twitching body of his dead friend. He raised his gun savagely. A shot blasted the frightful stillness—and his gun dropped out of his hand!

This time Silk realized that the shot had come from the darkness behind him. Hope surged through his heart, but not for long. As the second victim of that uncanny marksman dropped, Wolfram screeched orders. "Kill him—no matter what happens!"

The men started forward. Instantly, unholy bedlam burst loose. An automatic rifle sent whining chunks of steel just above the heads of the charging men. They broke in terror and spread wildly in all directions.

The rapid shooting followed them as they headed for their cars, did not stop even when they piled into two black sedans. A few snapped shots back at Silk, but they were fired on the run and the bullets missed by yards.

Abruptly, a weird form broke from the thick woods behind Silk. The gun poised at his shoulder was still firing a challenge at the fleeing men. Then, as the mysterious rifleman came into the scope of the headlights from the abandoned car, Silk gave a shout. There was no mistaking the simulated wings and the hood of the Black Bat!

SILK WAS so weak on his legs after his ghastly ordeal that the Black Bat helped him into the coupé, which had been well hidden off the lane. He grinned at Silk.

"Those rifles certainly came in handy. I reached Anton Morino's house just as they were carrying you out, so I followed the parade. While they held a conference in the farmhouse, I found myself a good spot for some neat shooting. Two of them are dead. If the others hadn't run, there would have been a slaughter. You see, Silk, you're worth a thousand of those lice. Now if you feel well enough, we'll see what those dead men have on them. I'd also like to take a look inside the farmhouse."

As they searched the dead spies, they piled up a small heap of junk. The men were well supplied with cash, which the Black Bat appropriated.

"We'll send it to the Red Cross," he smiled.

"Silk, look at this. It's a plain heavy card with a series of small holes punched in it. See the way those holes are arranged? Three with short spaces, then a large space and two more. In some places there are as many as five of the holes in a group."

"Code?" Silk asked promptly.

"I don't know. A code of this kind, depending on sets of symbols, wouldn't necessarily have to consist of holes. It would be easier to make a few dots. Anyhow, we'll take these with us. If it is a code, I'll study it as soon as I have time. Let's head for the farmhouse."

The Black Bat picked up the automatic rifle in his crooked arm, and Silk held the repeater rifle equipped with telescopic sights.

"They've got a leader they call the Director," Silk said. "I overheard that much before they grabbed me. Whatever they are up to is about ready, so they'll strike soon. This Director isn't even known to them. He makes them turn their backs when he leaves the place. Maybe he puts a screen in front of him while he talks. Anyway, I heard him tell those skunks that more orders would follow and all they had to do was merely to keep their eyes open."

"Odd," the Black Bat said puzzledly. "Keep their eyes open for orders? They usually come by mouth. He should have told them to keep their ears cocked instead. This is no haphazard organization, Silk. It's headed by a man specially trained for this kind of work. Either he or his lieutenants must be in the confidence of certain high officials. That's what makes it difficult. You can't clean up a snake's nest until you know where it is. Watch out now. We may run into some trouble in this house."

The Black Bat found that only an unlocked screen door barred his way. He opened it, dodged with cautious swiftness into a big kitchen. He and Silk grew rigid. From one of the distant rooms came a low moan. Holding their rifles ready, they searched the place. In the living room they found a gray-haired man lying in a pool of his own blood. He was still alive, but dying fast. A knife had been thrust through his throat, and another wound close to his heart was pumping a scarlet stream.

PAINFULLY THE dying man lifted one hand off the floor. Between his shaking fingers he held a card that had been punched with a series of holes exactly like those they had taken from the two dead spies. The gray-haired victim seemed to be trying to tell them something with his eyes, for the knife in his throat prevented speech. When the Black Bat took the card, the man attempted a wan smile before his head dropped with a bang on the floor.

"They killed him because he probably knew too much and they thought he wasn't trustworthy," the Black Bat said grimly. "We'll pay them back for this murder. Search the house, Silk. Look especially for letters and papers."

While Silk busied himself; the Black Bat compared the three cards. The two that had been taken from the dead spies were identical. The holes matched up exactly when he placed one over the other. But the third, which was still wet with the murdered man's blood, didn't compare at all. The holes were in radically different series. That these cards meant something vitally important was absolutely plain, but the Black Bat could find no answer.

Silk came hurrying down from the second floor with a bunch of letters tied with a piece of rough cord. The Black Bat opened several of them, found they were written in German. He knew enough of the language to make a rough translation.

"Damn them," he cried. "Silk, this man died trying to help us! He was in league with the spy ring, but not because he wanted to be. These letters are from his wife and two daughters, who are interned in Germany. The letters plead with him to obey the orders of the Gestapo and to keep a close mouth about everything. Now, probably, those three helpless women will be killed or forced to work themselves to death for a cause they hate. This isn't new. They've done it before, in several parts of the world, but it's the first time I've come into actual contact with it. Silk, I wish I'd cut down every one of those men. Come on, we're going back to town. I want to see a Tyrolean Austrian named Anton Morino."

CHAPTER VI

Two Sick Men

CAUTIOUSLY the Black Bat parked his car near Anton Morino's home.

"I'll take the rear," he told Silk. "You tackle the front. Use that automatic rifle if necessary. If Morino was warned that you are still alive, he has probably run away. But I have a hunch those rats we dispersed are too busy hunting their own cover to help anyone else."

Silk approached the house carefully, and in silence climbed over the east railing of the porch. He bent low for a quick look inside. A man, about fifty years old, was pacing the floor, nervously running his hand through his thick shock of pure white hair. He was heavily built, though not tall, and clad in expensive clothing. He looked clever and meticulous about his appearance.

Silk didn't wait. There might be others in the house, but by now the Black Bat would be ready for action. Silk stood erect, smashed the window with the barrel of his gun.

"Lift 'em high!" he snapped. "That's right. Now walk over here and unlatch this window. Open it wide. Move back ten paces and keep turned toward me. Don't forget that this is a Tommy-gun. It shoots fast and straight."

Silk climbed through the window. Anton Morino sat down heavily and covered his eyes, moaning.

"So it has come at last! For all that I have done, the reward is death. Yet I have expected it." He looked up and his face was agonized. "Shoot—go ahead and shoot me! That's what they sent you here for. I know that one failure is repaid with execution. I have failed, somehow. I don't know how. I don't even care. It will be heaven's blessing when I am dead. Shoot, damn you! Why do you look at me like that?"

A curtain at the far end of the room moved aside and the Black Bat emerged. When he stepped up to Anton Morino, the Nazi's harrowed look changed to awe and terror. He started from his chair, but Silk pushed him back.

"You are the Black Bat!" Morino screamed. "They killed you! You are dead! They told me they were taking you away to kill you—and they never fail..."

"They fail more often than they admit," the Black Bat answered grimly. "Morino, you deliberately lured Colonel Catlin out of his apartment tonight, and sent him over a route alone that you knew would mean his death. You are involved in this spy ring. Unless you tell me everything about it, you really will die. First of all, why did you think this man with the machine gun was sent here to kill you?"

"Because I failed them," Morino groaned. "They do not tolerate failure, even when it is not my fault. Colonel Catlin is my friend. I didn't want to help in his murder, but what else could I do? They forced me into it. When he did not die, they said my arrangements were not satisfactory and I would hear from the Director. We men in the ranks hear from him only by bullets or knives. You must believe me."

"Just keep on talking," the Black Bat said. "Who is this Director? Where is the headquarters of the ring? What are they up to?"

"I don't know who he is," Morino cried hysterically. "No one knows his name nor what he looks like. He never permits himself to be seen. But he must be an important man, high in the confidence of officials, because he seems to know everything. There are no headquarters. The Director designates a certain place, and those who receive the orders assemble there. Tonight it was in my own home.

"His intentions are to disrupt the preparedness plans of the United States by any methods necessary. He cares nothing for human lives. He also wishes to prevent supplies from reaching his military enemies. I tell you, he is not human. He is a monster from the depths of hell!"

"What hold does he have on you?" the Black Bat suddenly demanded.

MORINO STAGGERED to his feet, clenching his hands.

"There is no use in being silent now. I am to be killed in any case. Let me open the safe hidden in the farther wall. I can show you things that will make your eyes open wide!"

He didn't wait for permission to cross the room. As he headed toward the farther wall, Silk and the Black Bat followed more slowly. But when he neared a wide rear window, he broke into a wild run and dived recklessly through the glass. Landing in a flower bed outside, he sprang up instantly and streaked away into the darkness.

Silk jerked the machine gun to his shoulder, but the Black Bat pushed the barrel down.

"We'll get him late, alive," he said. "Morino is desperate, Silk. He took a mighty long chance just now and he must have had some terrific reason for it. Keep your eyes open while I search the place."

Morino's home revealed none of the mysteriously punched cards. In fact, it seemed to have been stripped of anything which might have damaged Morino or the spy ring. The Black Bat wondered if he shouldn't have let Silk fire a withering hail of lead after the fleeing man. There was a chance that Morino had put on a good act. Was he the Director, the cunning spy leader who guided every movement along the path to death and destruction?

"Morino put up the bail for Hans Hofer's release," the Black Bat said later, as he and Silk were driving toward Tony Quinn's home. "Ten thousand dollars is a lot of cash to sacrifice, which means there's a paymaster, Silk. He may be this man known as the Director, but I'm sure this cash comes from Berlin and in quantities that are amazing. Imagine it! While their own people are half starved and go around in ersatz clothes, or barely any at all, the Nazi Government sends millions over here to keep their Gestapo busy. If we could stop that source of income, we'd break the spy ring wide open. They're faithful to the Fatherland, all right—as long as the money flows freely."

"Butch said there was another man with Morino," Silk informed. "A lawyer named Tolly obtained a habeas when the police refused to release Hofer even on bond. He also must know something. Why not pay him a visit?"

The Black Bat looked into the rear view mirror of the coupé. He wasn't being trailed, and no pedestrian was in sight. He pulled over to the curb.

"It's almost morning, Silk. We need rest and time to outline our plans. Tolly can wait. Let's go through the garden gate now. Hurry."

LATE the next morning, Tony Quinn, holding his cane, tapped along the paths through his estate. His eyes were blank, staring straight ahead, as he walked with the characteristic caution of a blind man. A few people in the neighborhood saw him, which was exactly what he wanted. Not even for an instant did he wish Tony Quinn to be considered anything but hopelessly stone-blind. His former affliction now provided him with an excellent alibi.

Shortly after noon he entered the secret laboratory where he could work unobserved. Placing the three cards in front of him, he studied them with puzzled, brooding eyes. The cards were about the size of ordinary postcards, and the holes punched in them were perhaps a sixteenth of an inch in diameter. When he measured the distance between them, he found that even though several of the holes were grouped together, they were irregularly spaced. Obviously some kind of machine had punched those holes, yet why was there a discrepancy in the spaces?

The Black Bat had access to several master codes. For two hours he vainly tried to associate those holes with a code, but it just couldn't be done. He realized that each recipient of these cards might have a key in the form of a letter or book. By placing the card in a certain position, the holes would bring out certain letters.

"But if that's it," Quinn muttered, "this message must consist of about three small words. These holes wouldn't reveal entire words of ordinary print. There must be something else, some other way of using these cards. Here I probably have the solution to the whole mystery in my hands, and I can't even use it!"

Carol came through the tunnel, soon after dark. She listened intently as Tony Quinn described the events of the night before, and with each word her pretty face became more worried.

"They're such desperate men," she cried, "ready and eager to kill anyone! Fighting them here is worse than fighting them on an actual battleground. There you can recognize the enemy—the one in front, anyhow. But the enemy doesn't wear any uniform here, and he doesn't attack in the open. His weapon is a knife in the back. I wish there were no wars, no world troubles. Why can't we be fighting some nice gentlemanly band of murderers, or maybe some pleasant orphan asylum arsonists instead of these treacherous wolves?"

Quinn chuckled and sat down beside her.

"So far the score is in our favor, and I hope it stays that way. If I only knew where they'd strike next—what their main objectives are—but I'm temporarily stuck. I can't even find any members of that band to argue with."

CAROL LOOKED down at her well-manicured nails and said:

"A week ago you told me about the various travel agencies in town, the ones that specialize in arranging trips to Germany, Austria, Holland and Italy. I've checked them. Since the war started, they have done no business whatsoever, yet they are still in business. Their staffs remain the same, though no customer ever enters the offices. They haven't sold a steamship ticket in months, and still they pay rent on time."

"That's great news, Carol," Quinn exclaimed, his eyes glowing. "You've done fine work. Those agencies can legally, and without arousing suspicion, obtain money grants from their home offices. I suspect the whole business is controlled by the Gestapo. Through these travel agencies the spies must be supervised and paid off. That is the answer, I think."

"There is one group of German agencies," Carol went on. "They're headed by a man called Fritz von Elkin, and if I ever saw a true Nazi, he is it. He lives like a prince and keeps an office like the late Ziegfeld's, just above his travel agency on West Boulevard. I went in, asked for a job and did they snow on me! My accent wasn't so good, I guess."

"Well, that's something to start on," Quinn said thoughtfully. "Fritz von Elkin, eh? That hero used to lecture some years ago on German submarine warfare. I remember that when he told about sailors and passengers swimming hopelessly fifty miles from shore, he actually glowed all over. His attitude was so obvious that nobody would attend any more of his lectures. Von Elkin was an efficient submarine commander, and now he's probably a good spy. So we'll try to scuttle Herr von Elkin. Perhaps, if we get too close, he'll scuttle himself. We'll enter von Elkin's name in my mythical black book. Anton Morino heads it just now, and a lawyer named Tolly also seems to warrant being included."

"Can't I help you, Tony?" Carol asked. "About von Elkin, I mean."

Quinn shook his head. "I'm going to give von Elkin the benefit of my personal attention, Carol. You're much too pretty to be a burglar, and that's exactly what the Black Bat will become tonight. I'm going to perform a one man raid on the headquarters of the travel agency chain, as soon as I can get there.

"See if you can comfort Butch. He mopes around gloomily like a St. Bernard with his tail hanging down and swears I'm neglecting him. But there just isn't an opening for strong-arm work yet. Be a good girl and find Silk for me—without exhibiting yourself around the windows too much. Tony Quinn has no interest in girls, you know."

Carol doubled her fist and playfully tapped Quinn's chin with it.

"In other girls, you mean. I'll find Silk for you."

Quinn was donning his black clothing when Silk hurried in.

"Silk, get the big car out of the garage," he ordered. "I've got to visit the business section—as Tony Quinn. I want you to drive."

SILK parked across the street from a big business building. Across the full width of a huge window on the second floor ran a lurid neon sign, proclaiming that the Elkin Travel Service maintained its headquarters there. Above that were the windows of professional men's offices, mostly attorneys and doctors.

"I'm not feeling well," Quinn told Silk. "Something in the pit of my stomach makes me quite ill at times, so I think I'll pay Dr. Norton a visit. His offices are only one flight above the travel agency There's a tow rope in the back of the car. Please take it out and help me coil it under my coat."

"You're not really sick, are you?" Silk asked with a worried frown.

Quinn pursed his lips. "Yes, but it's not incurable. It has something to do with a spy ring. Their methods are a bit nauseating, but the good Dr. Norton may be able to help. Here is where you come in. You're sick, too—headaches often bother you, and you want a complete physical examination. You'll see Norton first. He doesn't know you, and neither do I. Understand? Get that rope."

Silk took Tony Quinn's arm after he helped him out of the car. Quinn looked straight ahead with the blank stare of a blind man. As he tapped his cane, Silk led him across the street and into the building. They separated in the lobby and Silk went up first.

Quinn gave him five full minutes before he entered the elevator and had the attendant lead him to Dr. Norton's offices. When he went in, the most careful observer would have sworn that those eyes saw nothing. But Quinn noticed with satisfaction that there were no other patients. Dr. Norton came out, helped him into a chair.

"Tony, I haven't seen you in weeks! There's nothing seriously wrong, I hope?"

"Not at all," Quinn smiled. "Shall I go in?"

"If you don't mind, I have a patient in there now. It will take about half an hour, possibly a little longer. I'll ask him to wait if you're in a hurry."

"Did you ever know a blind man to be in a hurry?" Quinn countered. "I'll just sit here. Give your patient all the time he needs."

CHAPTER VII

Blind Man's Bluff

THE instant Dr. Norton closed his door, Quinn swiftly went into action. He removed the gray tweed trousers he always wore, revealing beneath them the clothes of the Black Bat. From under his coat he took the robe and hood. After donning them, he hid his tweeds under the cushions of the sofa. Hastily he uncoiled the rope Silk had given him, opened the window and looked down. The rear windows of von Elkin's tourist agency were just below He anchored the rope in such a way that it would hardly be noticed. Letting himself out the window, he lowered the sash so there would be no draft to puzzle Dr. Norton.

As he dangled just outside one of the agency windows, he opened the lock without much trouble and climbed into von Elkin's private suite. He listened carefully, heard nothing.

He examined the contents of the desk, though the place was dark. That didn't trouble him, for the Black Bat needed no light. When he found nothing of importance in the desk, he tackled the locked files standing against a wall. None of his keys would open them, and even a small pick he frequently used proved to be ineffectual.

"Well," he muttered, "von Elkin must have something mighty private in these drawers to have special tumbler locks installed on them." He sighed wearily. "I can't open it like a Jimmy Valentine, so I'll have to do the job as Butch would handle it."

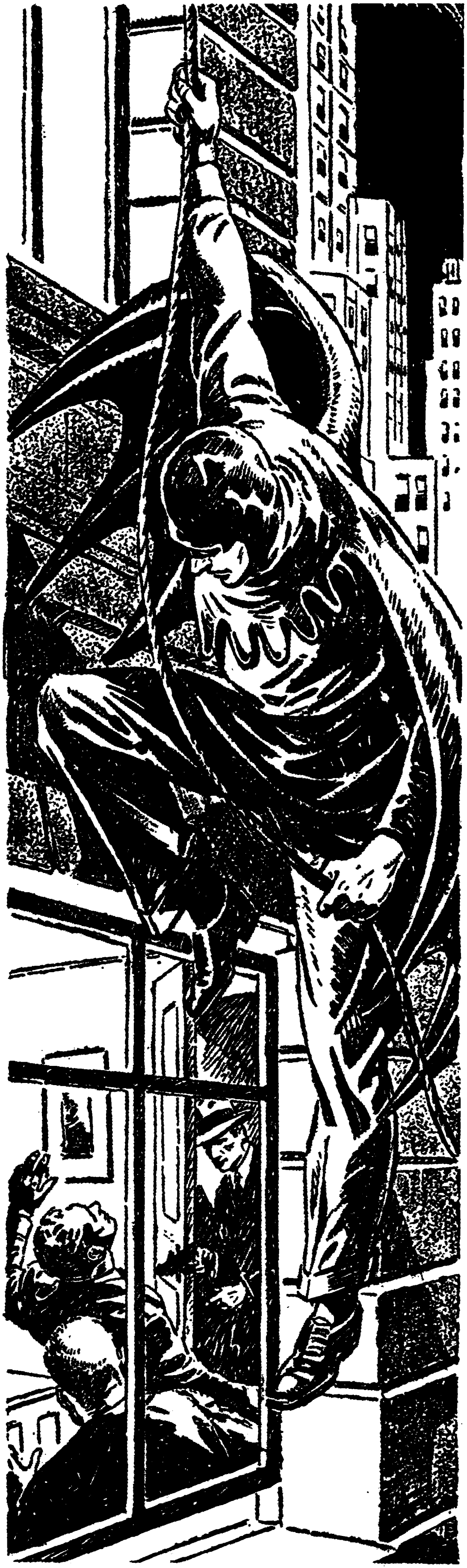
For work of this kind, he always carried a compact kit of the finest tools. A special chisel, hit noiselessly with a padded hammer, cut a small hole in the steel paneling. As he inserted another instrument and twisted it, a large section of the cabinet ripped open like a sardine can. His sensitive fingers manipulated the lock through this hole and the drawer slid open easily.

The Black Bat saw a portfolio lying at the bottom of the drawer. He removed it and glanced sharply at the contents. They consisted of several maps of New York Harbor, showing particularly the placements of the shockingly few anti-aircraft batteries. Before he could search farther, he heard a key being inserted into a lock somewhere outside the office.

The Black Bat replaced the portfolio, stepped quietly to the door and moved with amazing speed to the window where his rope dangled. He gripped it, launched himself into space. But he didn't climb back to Dr. Norton's office. Instead, he began swinging in long arcs until he could look into the window of von Elkin's private quarters. When he reached it, his soft-soled shoes stopped the swing. Balancing himself precariously, he risked a quick glance into the now lighted offices.

Von Elkin, a towering man with a square face and a completely bald head, was cursing luridly at the sight of his burglarized steel drawer. There was one other man in the room—Anton Morino! But he didn't act the craven, terrorized victim of the spy ring's vengeance now. He appeared utterly confident of himself.

"I have long suspected something like this would happen," von Elkin grated. "No matter what the orders are, we go now! I cannot see why the



He saw the gun fire twice.

orders were countermanded, anyway—nor why they sent you to tell me I should come back and make doubly sure I left nothing."

Morino was facing von Elkin, with his back toward the office door. As the Black Bat watched, the door opened slowly, silently, and a gloved hand holding a Luger pistol came into view. Before the Black Bat could give any kind of warning, the gun fired twice. Morino threw up his hands convulsively. He fell on the top of the desk and slid off it slowly, leaving a trail of dripping blood.

Five seconds later, a police whistle blasted the quiet outside the building. Loud voices shouted orders. The Black Bat took one more quick glance through the window. Von Elkin was running wildly toward the door.

THE Black Bat put the soles of both feet against the wall. Rapidly, he climbed back to the window of Dr. Norton's waiting room, and was relieved when he saw that no other patients had entered. He closed the window quickly and coiled the rope around his middle, after he had removed the Black Bat's hood and cape. He slipped into the tweeds he had hidden under the sofa cushions, replaced his jacket and sat down hastily. Perhaps twenty minutes had elapsed since he had invaded von Elkin's offices.

Quinn's abnormally sensitive ears could hear the sound of confusion in the building and on the street. His hands, clasped on the curved handle of his cane, worked nervously. What was going on? Who had killed Morino? Why? What had von Elkin meant when he wondered why Morino had arrived with countermanded orders?

Ten minutes went by while Tony Quinn fidgeted and tried to puzzle out the meaning of all the excitement. Then Silk and Dr. Norton emerged from the consultation rooms. Silk glanced casually at Quinn and walked out. Dr. Norton helped Quinn to his feet and guided him into the other room. Dragging up a chair, he listened as Quinn described some symptoms indicative of an abused stomach. With a smile, the doctor wrote out a prescription, and they talked for a few minutes before Quinn left.

It took a long time for the elevator to reach his floor. When it finally arrived, the operator was shaking with excitement.

"Know what happened?" he yelped. "A G-man raid! Yes, sir—they just raided a tourist place, one of them German agencies! Boy, I never seen so many cops and G-men!"

Quinn left the elevator and entered a crowded lobby. Two men in plainclothes stepped up to him.

"Where did you come from?" one demanded. "Did you see a bald-headed, fat-faced man anywhere in the building?"

Quinn shook his head sadly. "I've been visiting Dr. Norton on the third floor. I didn't see anyone. I'm blind." A uniformed police lieutenant approached and recognized Quinn instantly.

"It's okay, boys," he said. "This is Tony Quinn. He's blind, all right. Used to be D.A. before some rats threw acid in his eyes. How are you, Mr. Quinn?"

"Pretty fair," Quinn answered. "What in the world is happening?"

"We just raided a spy nest, sir. Got evidence enough, but no rat. He must have been tipped off. Can I help you outside?"

"Thanks, I'd appreciate it," Quinn said. "My car and the driver are across the street."

Silk elbowed his way to Quinn's side. As he reached for his employer's arm, Quinn was suddenly jerked around. Silk's face went grim, but Tony Quinn only looked blankly over the head of the man who held him. It was Detective-captain McGrath, self-appointed tracker of the Black Bat.

"Wait a minute, Quinn," McGrath snapped. "There's been a murder in this building. In the past few hours there were four others. Two of them were branded with the Black Bat's insignia. Get what I mean?"

"I gather the significance, McGrath," Quinn replied tiredly. "You think I'm the Black Bat. You *believe I killed* five men and stamped the murders as the work of the Black Bat. Then why don't you arrest me, Captain?"

McGrath flushed. "You know damned well why. Twenty doctors would swear you're blind. I'd make a fool out of myself."

"Don't flatter your creative ability," Silk put in with smooth irony. "You were a fool even before they threw you out of the second grade. Listen, Sherlock, Mr. Quinn is sick. He came here to visit Dr. Norton. Dr. Norton's office is upstairs. Now that Dr. Norton has examined him, I am going to take Mr. Quinn home. Is that simple enough for you to understand?"

"Try leaving here and I'll jug both of you," McGrath threatened. "Stay where you are till I see this Dr. Norton, if there is such a guy. Maybe this is one time you tripped on your own smartness, Quinn."

AS McGrath disappeared into the building, an official car pulled up and two men emerged. Although the most careful observer would never have noticed his quick glance, Quinn recognized both men. One was Police Commissioner Warner, a slender, distinguished looking man. Beside him was Philip Trent, whom Quinn had known for ten years.

At one time, he had sympathized with Trent for the whole side of the man's face was deeply scarred, his hair was perfectly white, and he walked with a decided limp.

Quinn knew what had caused that. Trent had been a captain in the A.E.F. in 1918, when he led his men in a savage attack. Shrapnel and machine-gun bullets had almost torn him to shreds. Plastic surgery was crude in those days, and it hadn't helped his appearance much, although it had probably saved his life. Since he had also been badly scarred, Tony Quinn knew just how Trent must feel, yet the man worked prodigiously and was well on the way to becoming a power in politics.

Warner spotted Quinn and hurried up to him.

"Tony! What are you doing here?"

"He's waiting for a genius to make sure he didn't murder five guys," Silk explained witheringly. "Five, no less!"

Warner frowned. "McGrath again, eh? Well, Tony, you're free to go any time you wish. McGrath's suspicions are becoming a nuisance. Do you know Phil Trent? Oh, yes—of course you do."

Trent took Quinn's hand and clasped it firmly

"Glad to see you again, Tony. It's too bad you're not the D.A. these days. We could use a man like you to fight these fifth columnists."

"He's right," Warner agreed warmly. "In conjunction with Federal men, we just raided a German tourist agency. I understand some evidence has been found, but the birds we hoped to trap left their nest. Trent is working with us and with the Federal authorities, helping to run down these influences. Wait. Here comes McGrath. I can tell by his face that the news he learned isn't at all satisfying."

McGrath saluted Warner and then looked at Quinn.

"You can go now, I guess. Doc Norton alibis you okay. The dead man upstairs hasn't got a Black Bat sticker on him, either."

"Ah," Quinn smiled. "Then my wrists are not going to be handcuffed. That's a distinct relief, Captain, although I sympathize with your disappointment. I know just how much you want to find the Black Bat. I'm particularly honored that you think I might be he."

"You?" Trent exploded. "How can any man in his right senses think you—Oh, I'm sorry Tony. I know just how it feels to be—well, unable to take part in any activity. But McGrath's accusation was so absurd."

Quinn was looking directly at Warner as he answered Trent.

"Forget it. A thing like this makes life interesting for a blind man. It gives me a great deal to think about. Good luck with your spy hunt, gentlemen. Silk, let's go back to the car."

SILK led him through the crowd. As they reached the outer fringe of it, the driver spoke softly.

"When you get into the car, take a look at the entrance of the building, sir. There's a short, loudly dressed man there. It's Tolly, the lawyer who bailed out Hans Hofer! I overheard the cops questioning him. He's got an office on the seventh floor."

Quinn glanced across the street for a fraction of a second. McGrath was talking to the man Silk had described. Apparently everyone in the building was being questioned. Quinn leaned back against the cushions and lit a cigarette while Silk wormed his way through the slowly moving traffic.

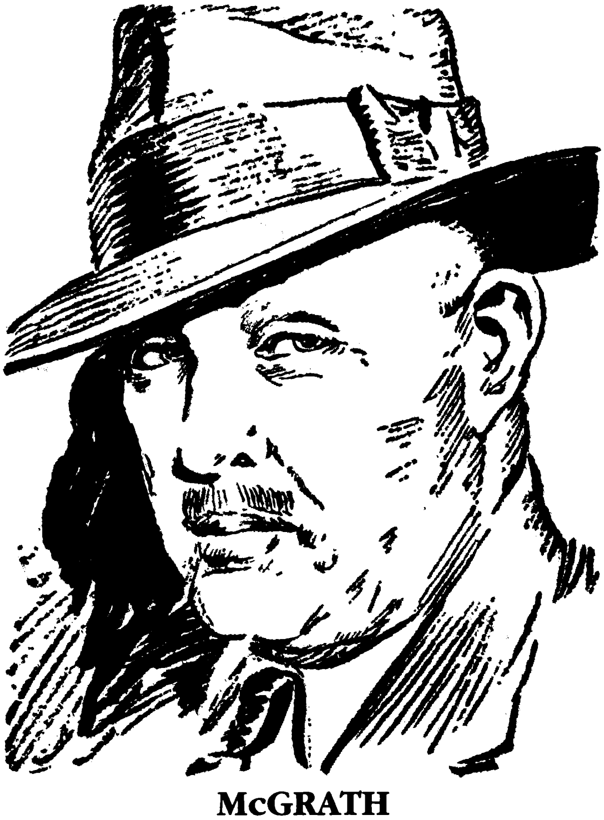
"I saw the murder McGrath described," he stated quietly. "The victim was Anton Morino, but I don't know who killed him. Von Elkin was in there, too, only he got away. I can't figure out how he escaped. There was evidence in his offices that he was engaged in spy work, but you know that von Elkin is no fool. I can't believe that he'd be careless enough to leave such evidence lying around."

Silk picked up a newspaper and handed it to Quinn.

"I bought it while I was waiting for you, sir. There's an item on the front page that looks interesting."

Quinn put the paper on his lap in such a position that no one could possibly notice that he was reading it. The boxed item certainly was interesting.

> ARMY OFFICER THWARTS BANDITS
>
> Major Oliver Rankin, retired, successfully routed two robbers in the secluded sections of Bryant Park late this afternoon. They attempted to use blackjacks on him, but they did not realize that Major Rankin at one time was runner-up for the Army boxing championship. The major seems to have lost none of his prowess. Police are making an investigation. Major Rankin provided them with detailed descriptions of his assailants.



McGRATH

Quinn let the newspaper drop to the floor.

"So Rankin is on their list," he said. "Except for the attempt on Colonel Catlin's life, it's the first time the spy ring's executioners bungled their job. But Rankin is pretty fast with his fists even if he is nearly sixty years old. It's our break, Silk—the one I've been hoping for! They'll try to get Rankin again. Through the men assigned to kill him, I can contact the gang once more. Step on it!"

CHAPTER VIII

Men Without Mercy

WHILE POLICE and G-men searched for more evidence of the spy ring's activities at von Elkin's offices, and Tony Quinn returned to his home, a factory on the outskirts of the city became an extremely busy place for so late at night.

It was a fairly large building, run by a man named Aranoff, and engaged in the manufacture of metal barrels and tanks. The factory closed promptly at five. But now—though the hour was close to ten—one whole section was lit up and a number of cars stood inside the locked yard gates.

Word had gone out that the sales department was holding an important meeting, so the families living nearby thought nothing of it. Perhaps some of the employees wondered why business wasn't better with so large a sales force and all the meetings they held lately. But that was as far as their suspicions went.

Inside the plant, with every window and door carefully guarded, eighteen men were drawn up in two precise lines, standing at rigid attention. At the front of the large room was a five-inch dais, like a miniature stage. The face of it was studded with a battery of powerful lights that were equipped with reflectors.

Suddenly, all the other lights in the room died away and the stronger ones were turned on. They blazed straight into the eyes of that strange audience, but no man moved even a muscle. When a harsh voice gave an order, the two rows of men pivoted completely around in military formation. The harsh voice spoke again and they faced the lights. If anyone stood on that stage now, he was completely invisible to his audience, for those lights defied any eyes to penetrate their glare.

"This will be one of our final meetings," a man's voice announced from somewhere behind the lights. "Soon now you will see my face. When you do, you will laugh, my lieutenants, at the way we have tricked these gullible Americans. Now listen to orders. Each of you controls a certain section of this country. Under you are the *Gauleiters* who strut like peacocks—and rightly so, for they are the backbone of our organization. Under them are the privates—the men who will do the fighting. Some of them will do so willingly, because they believe. Others will do so because they are ordered, and know that if they fail, someone dear to them will find life most miserable in Europe. For those who are not citizens, we have arranged that upon a given word they are to be arrested and deported. They will be useful, and upon completion of our mission, we can cast them aside. For, mind you, my lieutenants, there will be no room here for other men who crave power. That lies in our hands, and ours alone!"

A gruff shout went up from the two ranks and their right hands shot stiffly outward in a salute.

"We are almost ready to strike," the unknown leader went on. "All over the nation our groups have their guns, their ammunition and bombs—even gasses, if necessary. Every man knows his job. When you leave here, cards will be distributed. You will forward, one to each of the *Gauleiters* and warn them to stand ready. Bauer, step forward."

ONE of the men in the front rank took two steps ahead of the others and stood at rigid attention.

"Your squads will concentrate on the submarine factories and bases in New England. They are to be blown to pieces beyond any hope of quick repair. Vogt and Schmidt, step forward."

Another pair moved out of ranks. The unknown spoke again, his voice venomous as he described their duties.

"You are in charge of the New York area. You will see to it that all transportation ceases, that officials who have spoken against us die. Confusion must reign throughout the city. The waterfront is to receive particular attention. No ship can remain intact nor any dock left useful. Our ships at sea will receive radio orders that will be taken care of.

"When we finish, this nation will be in such confusion that we can rapidly consolidate our positions. We shall create panic such as these fools have never before known. All their preparations for war will be demoralized. The help they are sending our enemies abroad will be cut off. We shall show them that we are the masters of the world!"

There were further explicit orders, all calculated to create panic and death. Great shouts went up, accompanied by the stiff-armed salutes. Then Fritz von Elkin stepped forward and received permission to speak.

"I have bad news. My travel agency was raided tonight. Anton Morino, one of our own kind, managed it! He lured me back to the office so I would be arrested, by stating that he had orders for me to take all my papers, even the non-incriminating ones. I escaped with the aid of the man who leads us so well. Once again he has proved beyond doubt that he is cut from the same great pattern as he who will eventually rule the world."

"And Morino is dead," the unknown's voice stated with a dry laugh. "I dislike only the fact that he died too quickly, for it was his scheme to have himself arrested with von Elkin. Then, safely in a cell, he would tell all he knew, how he was forced to help against his own will and judgment. But he was not quite clever enough, and his fate shall be a lesson to any of you men who may have the same idea.

"There is one other extremely important thing. We have not only the Federal authorities and the police to contend with, but also—the Black Bat! I see by your faces that you fear him. He is as aggressive as we, and he does not adhere to the silly laws of this country. Yes, he is a dangerous enemy, but not for long. Already I have set into motion a scheme which will trap him, and then—he dies!

"When I gave orders that Major Rankin was to be attacked without being injured, I knew just how the Black Bat would act. He has guessed our little scheme far ahead of the police. He knows we seek to eliminate as many trained officers as possible so the preparedness plans of this country will not go forward swiftly.

"The Black Bat will try to protect Major Rankin. Then we shall lure Rankin away, to a place of our own choosing. The Black Bat will follow. Rankin can be easily disposed of, and then we close in on the Black Bat. All is arranged. There cannot possibly be failure. By morning, the menace he constitutes will be no more."

MAJOR RANKIN, brittle-eyed disciplinarian and military tactician, adjusted his top hat while a doorman whistled for a cab.

"Nice evening, Major." The doorman touched the peak of his cap in salute. "Stepping out, eh?"

Rankin didn't smile in return, for he never smiled. Prior to his retirement two years before, he had been known as Sphinx Face.

"I'm making the rounds of my clubs," he stated. "Tomorrow I go back into active service. It seems they cannot do without me. Good night, Grogan."

Rankin climbed into the taxi and sat stiffly erect as it pulled away. The driver headed toward the Officer's Club, wondering unhappily if his tip would be the usual dime that Major Rankin dispensed. He cut over to an avenue and turned north, humming to himself, until another cab came alongside. The driver had his cap pulled so low that his features could not be seen. He blew a blast on his horn and yelled to Rankin's driver.

"Hey, buddy, the boys at the corner asked me to look for you. Your wife's been hurt. Better call your house quick."

The driver straightened up with a gasp, sought a hole in the traffic and pulled over to the curb. He got out and stuck his head in the door of the tonneau.

"Sorry, Boss, but it's my wife—she's been hurt. I'll call and see how bad she is. Won't take a minute and then I'll finish driving you to the club."

Rankin didn't like the idea, but he assented with a curt nod of his head. The driver vanished inside a drugstore.

Two men sidled up to the cab. One of them suddenly yanked open the door, jumped in and shoved a gun against Rankin's side. The other walked around the cab and slid behind the wheel.

"Quiet!" the man with the gun warned Rankin. "If you would live, do not utter one word."

The cab pulled away while Rankin turned scarlet with rage. Once he opened his mouth to speak, but the gun jabbed him painfully and he subsided. The gunman raised his head and peered out of the rear window.

"It goes well, Hugo. He comes."

Completely unaware that he was walking straight into a well-laid trap, the Black Bat trailed Rankin's taxi. He had witnessed the clever change of drivers and blessed the hunch that warned him the killers might strike quickly.

When the taxi reached the outskirts and picked up speed, he drew one of his automatics and laid it on the seat beside him. Apparently Rankin was being taken to some spy nest. The Black Bat determined not to strike until he could really damage the spy ring.

THE TAXI driver tooted his horn as he drove up to the gates of a medium-sized factory. A man hurried across the yard to open the gates. They closed after the cab passed through. It drove directly into a garage.

The Black Bat also stopped. Getting out and holding his gun ready, he made a half circle of the factory until he reached the rear. The high fence was made of steel, which made him approach it warily. He knelt, gently tossed his gun against the steel wire. When no electric spark leaped out, he knew it was safe to climb the fence. He went over it with the agility of a monkey.

On the other side, he stopped to study the place. There was a loading platform at the back of the three story building. He made that his goal. The night was to his liking—dark and sultry with storm clouds gathering ominously in the sky. With the unerring help of eyes that could see as well in darkness as in light, the Black Bat reached the loading platform. He climbed up and glanced at the big sliding door. It was ajar about a quarter of an inch. He frowned, for it was almost an open invitation to enter.

Yet, he asked himself, how could the spies possibly know he was on their trail? If they had somehow become suspicious, certainly they would never have brought Major Rankin to this place. The Black Bat gently shoved aside the door enough to squeeze himself through....

CHAPTER IX

Black Battle

DESOLATE SILENCE greeted him. He knew he was in some kind of large shipping room, for tiers of steel drums were neatly stacked up. His eyes darted around. Not only could he feel the presence of hidden men—there was an almost indiscernible change in the darkness of the room.

Without turning, the Black Bat knew that the big door had slid shut silently, excluding the faint light from outside. In the pitch darkness he drew his second gun, slipped the safety off and began moving along close to the wall. The advantage of the darkness lay in his favor. Anyone concealed in the rows of steel drums couldn't see him, but he was not handicapped by the absence of light.

When he passed the fourth tier, he suddenly tensed. Two men were crouching low, both holding drawn revolvers. One of them motioned with his free hand. As he crawled down the alley between the barrels, three others followed.

The Black Bat didn't wait for the attack to come. That would be fatal, because these men would open fire the instant they had a target. He began running lightly, without making a single sound. He selected the alley next to the one along which the killers were approaching. Halfway up it, he stopped and listened. They were separated from him only by the steel drums that towered high above.

The Black Bat placed both hands against the drums and pushed hard. They rocked dangerously. Someone let out a screech of warning, but it came too late. The row of barrels tipped over, crashed down on the men who were maneuvering to get the Black Bat from the rear.

In the unholy din, the Black Bat went streaking toward the door that led into the factory. But two men came rushing through it. At the same instant, someone abruptly got sense enough to throw on the light switch. Instantly, the Black Bat's advantage disappeared.

His guns blasted. The two spies coming through the door were hurled aside by the force of the forty-five slugs. The Black Bat's cape billowed out behind him, casting a weird shadow against the wall. How he left so quickly, the survivors of the battle never knew. They swore afterward that he simply left the ground and flew away.

Actually, he went through the door with the speed of a flash. Others would be waiting, and he had to protect himself. He reached a machine shop, spotted the switch panel just inside the door. He raced toward it, but he saw a gun in the hand of a spy who had suddenly appeared.

The Black Bat ducked behind a work-bench. Coming out on the other side, he snapped a single lightning shot. When the gunmen went down, he reached the switch panel, seized the wires and ripped them loose. Instantly, the whole place was shrouded in darkness again.

But flashlights went into action. One picked out the Black Bat as he raced through the machine room. He fired in the direction of the beam. Answering bullets whizzed past his ear as he dodged out of the room.

He was at the front of the building, with four men challenging his attempt to escape through the door. Though they couldn't see the Black Bat, he could see them. Glimpsing a staircase, he went up the steps three at a time. No one was at the landing to intercept him.

As he headed down another long workroom, though, four men came swarming in his direction. Apparently, they had been covering the rear windows and the yard in case he tried to escape through the shipping room door.

THE BLACK BAT whirled and raced to the third floor, where the offices were situated. Other men pounded up the stairs in pursuit and harsh voices were giving orders. He had a brief moment to wonder what had become of Major Rankin. The man seemed to have disappeared completely.

Looking straight through the darkness, the Black Bat saw that office space occupied only about one-third of the floor, and factory space the rest. The office was a poor place to stand them off. They might have another way of getting to this floor, perhaps even come at him from behind.

The Black Bat darted between the desks. Closing and locking a door behind him, he emerged into a spacious room filled with half completed steel drums. There were several oxy-acetylene torches on small hand trucks, by which they could easily be moved around. Half a dozen shots rang out. The Black Bat ducked, realized that for a second he had been standing in front of a window. His form had been darkly silhouetted as a target.

"No more shooting—for the moment!" someone called out authoritatively. "He is trapped. There is no way out for him now. If he goes through the windows, he must jump three stories, right into the hands of the men we have waiting there. We have the Black Bat cornered and we can take our own time in exterminating him. There is no use exposing ourselves. We shall force him into that small room at the back, where we can fix him with gas—a quiet, certain and pleasant way.

"One of you go downstairs to the chemical laboratory. You will find a large and well-equipped one there. Two others dismantle the big exhaust fan in the rolling room and bring it here, while another repairs the electric light system. Hurry!"

The Black Bat crept toward a window and cautiously peered out. His escape really was cut off. Two men armed with rifles stood behind cover, looking up and watching continuously. The man who headed this particular unit of the spy ring knew that the Black Bat was powerless. He planned to release some deadly gas and blow it in the Black Bat's direction with a huge fan! There was no possibility of help. If the shots had attracted any attention, the men planted outside the factory could say a small night shift was engaged in some special work which happened to be unusually noisy.

The Black Bat took advantage of the temporary lull to wonder just how he was going to get out of this trap. If he were wounded, or if the gas knocked him out, they'd unmask him and the Black Bat would be exposed as Tony Quinn. That would finish his activities and place his life in constant danger even if he did worm his way from the net now thrown around him.

There seemed to be nothing he could do but put his back against the wall and go down with as much company as possible. He still had a few slugs in his guns and an extra clip for each weapon. By making every shot count, he might wear his enemies down. But nobody could intimidate gas with bullets. The spies seemed complacently aware of that, so they were in no hurry to risk their lives in actual combat.

A score of oxy-acetylene tanks were piled up, making a barrier behind which he crouched. Nothing short of a field-gun could break that down.

Abruptly, the Black Bat heard the preparations that were being made to smoke him out. He heard them set up the big fan, heard the clink of heavy bottles and the splashing of liquid. The spies kept well out of the range of the Black Bat's guns, for they didn't have to take risks now.

The enormous fan suddenly whirred to life. The mighty breeze it created blew the first cloud of gas toward the Black Bat. His nostrils quivered with dread. Beneath the hood he turned pale—for they weren't intent on simply knocking him out. This was chlorine—one of the deadly gasses used in the First World War! They had easily manufactured it out of chemicals that were common to any laboratory

ONLY ONE thing lay in the Black Bat's favor. The room in which he was trapped was large. It would require several minutes before a sufficient concentration of the gas could be manufactured to kill him. But what good could that do him? Even several hours wouldn't help much, unless the morning shift of employees arrived immediately after dawn.

He fingered his guns and pondered the chances of making a sweeping charge, shooting down as many of the spies as he could, and trying to make a fierce, swift escape. The odds were probably a thousand to one against success. But by staying here—waiting for the gas to take effect—he had no chance at all. The Black Bat was rapidly understanding how Silk must have felt, tied to a tree and bracing himself for inevitable death.

The Black Bat suddenly coughed—hard, racking coughs. Instantly, he heard the derisive laughter of the spies clustered somewhere behind the big fan. The Black Bat realized that they must have located some independent source of electrical power—batteries perhaps, or an emergency switch to operate the fan. The lights hadn't gone on yet, and he knew he had ruined the switch panel beyond hope of quick repair.

More and more of the gas came sweeping his way. In less than fifteen minutes, he realized, he would be dead. Even if he managed to get clear by some miracle, his lungs would be permanently damaged. Of all the ghastly ways to kill, poison gas was the worst.

Gas! The Black Bat gave a start of hope. Perhaps he was not finished, after all....

Working furiously, protected by the darkness, he managed to lift one of the heavy tanks of oxy-acetylene gas to the floor. He rolled it slowly, making no noise at all, toward the middle of the big room. With two huge packing cases that he had seen earlier, he blocked the view from the doorway. Rapidly, he turned the valves of the tank, heard the hissing of another gas. If his plans didn't go awry, this gas would grant him life—

He scraped a match, touched it to the nozzle of the tank. Blue, almost colorless, the light of the burning gas made a dull glow in the room. He twisted the nozzle around, keeping the searing flame away from the hose connection to the tank. He deliberately placed the blazing jet two inches from the middle of the tank and waited long enough to see the metal start to melt under the terrific heat. Then he ran lightly toward the rear of the factory. In a corner as far away from the hissing jet as possible, he lay down and covered his head with his hands. He muttered a prayer as he waited.

It might bring a death as hideous as the one the spies intended for him. But it also would show what this factory really was—a hideout and meeting place for spies. Some of them might even be injured badly enough for them to be captured. At any rate, it was better than merely waiting like a docile animal for the slaughter.

Apparently the bluish glow from over the tops of the packing cases had attracted the spies. The Black Bat's eyes penetrated the darkness, saw two of them approach cautiously, with handkerchiefs over their noses and mouths. One gave a sudden yelp of alarm. They sped back—about four steps.

THE oxy-acetylene gas, under high compression in the tank, abruptly let go. The heat from the jet had penetrated the steel sides of the container. The explosion blew the spies back, lifted a section of the building's roof. It tore down one wall, gouged a hole through the floor, sent machinery and a stack of tanks rolling wildly. Debris smashed against every wall. Dirt, bricks and pieces of metal struck the Black Bat, although he had tried to protect himself.

A horrible silence clamped down as soon as the blast of the explosion died away. The Black Bat raised his head cautiously. Somewhere outside, automobile motors were roaring into life. He glanced out of the shattered window. Four cars were speeding through the open gate.

The Black Bat drew his guns and limped slightly across the floor, avoiding the weakened section around the spot where the tank of gas had rested. There was still plenty of chlorine to burn his eyes and lungs, but with all the windows blown out, enough fresh air rushed in to dilute the deadly gas.

The Black Bat reached the stairway. He realized that neighbors would put in an alarm, for part of the building was now on fire and thick columns of smoke were beginning to rise.

He saw one of the spies lying against a wall sprawled in death. Two others lay less than ten feet away.

He knelt beside one and made a swift, thorough search. There was nothing of significance in the pockets, but a bulge in the lining of the coat attracted his attention. He ripped the lining away, lifted out a neatly stacked sheaf of the mysteriously perforated cards.

Suddenly, a siren warned him of the danger of capture. The Black Bat raced down the stairs, ran like a streak across the first floor and through the shipping room door. He jumped off the loading platform, scurried toward the fence and was over it in a single motion.

All at once, he had disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER X

Set-Up For Murder

AS the Black Bat drove back to town, he realized that at no time during the battle had he seen Major Rankin nor heard his voice. Unless they had concealed him somewhere in the factory, he was either still in their hands or had escaped in the confusion.

The Black Bat was puzzled by that, for he imagined the spies would have killed Rankin the moment trouble started. They had orders to murder Rankin to slow up the preparedness program. They had less than no use for him alive—he might prove a decided hazard. Why, then, had he been permitted to escape or been taken with them in flight?

The Black Bat was still somewhat shaken by his nearness to death. His nerves were on edge, his muscles sore from the tenseness. But worse than that, he felt he had failed his job by not rounding up the spies.

He eased up on the gas. Turning into the street near his home, he pulled to the curb not far from Butch's boarding house. A troubling thought struck him as he shut off the motor. How had those spies known he was coming to the factory? They couldn't possibly have spotted him on their trail unless they had been warned to expect his presence.

In the factory, though, everything had been set to surprise and capture him. They knew he was coming. But how? Major Rankin hadn't known he was under the observation of the Black Bat. Even he couldn't have set any trap.

With his hood and cape stowed under his coat, Quinn walked briskly toward the garden gate. A thousand questions were pounding insistently at his brain. Now, more than ever, he realized that he was fighting the brains and physical strength of a sinisterly clever, fiendishly powerful horde. This was no blundering gang group, but a highly developed organization that was skilled in murder, trained in all the forms of sabotage that existed, well paid, supplied with an abundance of money, and shockingly well shielded. To break down this spy ring, he would have to get at the leader, the baffling man who addressed his audience and then commanded them to turn their backs when he departed. Nothing short of the leader's capture and the obliteration of his first lieutenants would suffice.

To make matters worse, they might be set to strike at any moment of the day or night. When it came, it would involve the entire nation, Quinn was sure. Death and destruction would follow in their wake. With the element of surprise on their side, they might even gain control of parts of the country and hold them! What was it, if not war?

Tony Quinn slipped through the garden gate. After peering through the intense darkness, he disappeared into the garden house. As he hurried along the tunnel, he removed the floppy-brimmed hat that concealed his features. Silk was waiting for him with a rye and soda, in the spacious living room. Before doing anything else, Quinn downed the drink, instantly felt his tense nerves relax.

“I fell for one of their tricks,” he stated bitterly as he donned his tweeds and smoking jacket. “It almost cost me my life. Did anyone call?”

“Only Carol, sir,” Silk replied. “She's worried.”

“Risk phoning her that I'm all right,” Quinn ordered. “Tell her to checkup on Major Rankin if she can. Then keep watch while I do some work in the lab. Remember those perforated cards? I managed to get quite a few of them this time. Maybe now we can get some results.”

IN THE privacy of his lab, Tony Quinn carefully examined the stack of cards. All of them were perforated like the first ones. Unlike the others, though, the holes of three were all over the card, like some fantastic design.

He set up an infra-red machine, placed one of the cards under it and made a long, careful study of it. The rays brought into relief one corner section of each card, which seemed to have been treated. Quinn consulted a volume on secret ink preparations. Then he spent an hour mixing various solutions and trying to develop whatever was on the cards.

Finally, a light gray series of lines came into view, gradually forming into words. But even though he had overcome the secret of the ink, the words meant nothing. They read:

SECT. 10 No. 161

Every card showed the same meticulously hand-printed words. If they had indicated a volume and a page, his lead might have materialized, but with merely a numbered section and just a plain number, they meant nothing. The ink with which the cards were treated was one that had been developed in German laboratories not ten months before. In other words, the spy ring was in constant communication with the Fatherland, and worked with only the most modem devices of espionage.

Quinn straightened up from his exacting work. Silk had placed all the late editions of the newspapers on the bench. Going through them quickly, Quinn found nothing new. The raid on von Elkin's travel office was described, but no tangible results had been obtained, so the article rated only half a column. Maps had been found which incriminated von Elkin. The German travel expert had vanished, however.

On an inner page, Quinn spotted a brief item that made him whistle in amazement. A public meeting at the Officers' Club was in progress right now!

Several prominent men were to make speeches endorsing the preparedness program and denouncing the aggression of Europe's most savage invader. A list of notables who would be present was given. They included a great number of active and retired Army, Navy and Marine officers, some with the highest ranks.

Quinn folded the newspaper thoughtfully. It was only a few minutes after ten o'clock, and the meeting had been scheduled to begin at nine-thirty. But those affairs usually started late. The real business would certainly not come up for at least an hour after the meeting opened.

He picked up his cane and strode toward the door which led into his study. Instantly, his eyes went blankly staring, and his head assumed the rigid position of a blind man. He called to Silk as he entered the study.

"I'm going to attend a meeting at the Officers' Club," he said. "If those spies are intent on wiping out all the military experts they can, that meeting will be the best opportunity they'll ever have. Drive me there, Silk, and hurry."

"But if you're going as Tony Quinn, what can you do if anything starts?" Silk asked.

"I don't know. Probably nothing. But at least I'll be there and I'll be able to see what happens. Even the Black Bat couldn't invade a meeting hall that size, and it's too late to stop the spy ring's plans, I imagine."

THE committee arranging the meeting had selected a spacious auditorium in the center of the city. People were still streaming in when Silk stopped the car and helped Tony Quinn fumble out. He led him up the steps. Forcing a way through the crowd around the door, he managed to reach the entrance of the center aisle.

"I see Commissioner Warner, sir," Silk said. "He's down ahead of us. Shall I call him?"

"Yes, ask him if he can make room for me," Tony Quinn said. Several people approached, identifying themselves. He shook his head with a sad, gentle smile. He smiled in their general direction, yet never looked squarely at them. Suddenly, Commissioner Warner took his arm.

"Tony, why didn't you tell me you were coming here? I'd have arranged a better spot."

"I came on the spur of the moment, Commissioner," Quinn said. "Silk was driving by. I heard the sound of many people and asked him what was going on. He read me the banners and placards, so I decided to come in. A blind man appreciates things like lectures, you know. He has to amuse himself by emphasizing the medium of the ear rather than the eye."

Warner led him down the aisle to a good seat about halfway to the platform. Speeches were going on, all concerned with the armaments program. Quinn, sitting erect in his chair, stared straight ahead. His starkly blank eyes, however, saw everything all around him.

Major Rankin was seated in the first row and in frill uniform. He certainly seemed to be calm, despite his recent danger. How had he escaped? Why did he appear so unmoved by his near murder? Attorney Tolly was there, too, about five rows in front of Quinn. His oily, bland face kept turning around to study everyone in the audience.

Someone came down the aisle and passed close to Quinn. It was Colonel Catlin, whom the Black Bat had rescued from the spy ring's assassins only a few hours before. Catlin also was in full uniform.

Without moving his head, Quinn counted more than thirty ranking officers of the various military divisions. He squirmed around in his chair. Turning his head in the general direction of Commissioner Warner, he spoke softly, asking who was present. But that was only a pretext, for Quinn's eyes ranged over the entire south section of the auditorium. They missed nothing—not even the tall, square-shouldered man with the black beard and thick shock of black hair.

Trained to penetrate disguises, Quinn knew that Fritz von Elkin, sought by G-men and the police, must have an urgent reason for attending this meeting. He had no doubt at all that it was von Elkin. Now he was sure that things were ready to happen!

He groaned inwardly because he knew he would be helpless to act. Tony Quinn, a blind man, could not rise up to stem a sinisterly furtive attack. He racked his brain for some method of giving a warning. There was none that he could use successfully. Bitterly, he resented the pose of blindness he had unwillingly been forced to assume.

"Phil Trent is going to speak," Warner said softly. "Be ready to hear spies and saboteurs get their ears battened down. Trent is plenty upset about them. He's doing all he can to run down the vermin."

A ripple of applause went up as Trent mounted the speaker's platform. Quinn listened carefully, but he also watched everyone seated in front of him. They couldn't fail to strike, especially with von Elkin here. Though von Elkin certainly was not the mysterious leader of the ring, he was unquestionably a capable adjutant and a clever spy. It was more than possible that he would give the signal when the right time came.

Quinn's hands curled into fists. He had to check an urge to rise up and denounce von Elkin, queer the whole set-up, stop any possibility of murder. If he did—then what? Exposure, arrest, the inevitable end of the Black Bat. He relaxed unwillingly and forced all such thoughts out of his mind.

CHAPTER XI

Fog of Death

VEHEMENTLY Trent was speaking, with all the fire of true conviction for a just cause. His voice was passionate, his gestures perfectly timed. Everyone in the audience forgot his scarred face, his limping walk and the completely white hair that made him look much older than he was.

"We have among us, on every side, men who have been trained for years in sabotage. As head of the Officers' Club, I have done all within my power to combat these subversive influences, but I cannot do this alone. It requires the vigilance and courage of every red-blooded American who wants to go on living life as he knows it. We do not want the slavery which foreign legions would impose upon us if they gained control of this land of ours. The freedom we enjoy is worth fighting for—worth dying for ten times over!

"We do not want the glory of the world, not even the glory of our own nation—but a simple, small thing called honor. Without it, we will become slave legions under the thumb of a malignant power that will spread until we are completely squashed."

Tony Quinn joined in the round of applause that followed. Trent took a drink of water and sailed furiously into the rest of his speech.

"We are arming as fast as the might and resources of this nation can allow us. We are preparing to defend our rights and our own shores in this war-mad world. Yet, while we do this, there are thousands of men concentrated on one task—to slow up and eventually disrupt our defense preparations. To them, human life means nothing. They would no more hesitate to demolish a huge factory filled with workers, than they would shrink from blowing up some small trestle along a rural railroad siding.

"Those are the elements we must battle first. We must wipe them out, expose them for what they really are—treacherous, murderous, ruthless bandits with an insatiable desire for power. The organization which gives this series of lectures has not been idle. Not many hours ago we accumulated evidence against a travel agency which proved to be a spy nest. We found proof of that, even if the man who operated it managed to escape.

"There will be other raids, as fast as we can accumulate the necessary evidence. But we cannot do everything alone. Every citizen of the United States must watch for treachery, must expose it wherever it appears—in high places as well as low!"

Trent went on while his audience remained hushed, drinking in absorbedly every word he uttered. There was something so persuasive about his voice that his convictions reached every man who listened.

Tony Quinn kept staring straight ahead, though he knew that with every passing second the danger mounted higher and higher. His anxiety increased in the same proportion, until he felt as though he could not stand it any longer.

Abruptly, while Trent was still talking, Colonel Catlin jumped to his feet and leaped from his seat into the aisle. He took two or three steps in the direction of the platform.

Quinn saw ten men rise simultaneously on what must have been a prearranged signal. They hurled something against the walls, toward the platform, against the floor almost at their own feet. In no more than two seconds, the auditorium was shrouded in a white fog which even the Black Bat's eyes couldn't penetrate!

HOARSE shouts went up. Men milled about. Someone screamed. Tony Quinn felt, rather than saw, Commissioner Warner leave his chair to take command of the situation. Quinn stretched out both arms. There was no one on either side of him. He knew that his seat was located halfway between the aisles, which meant that the others in the auditorium would be pressed close to the aisles, leaving the center sections empty.

Quinn restrained himself no longer. He climbed on his chair, leaped over the row before his. He repeated this as fast as he could, and no one impeded him until he came to the first row. There two men were struggling furiously. He could see only the vague shapes of their bodies and hear their gasps for breath.

Two others suddenly found their way into the battle. Quinn saw one shadowy arm spring upward, plunge down viciously. With a strangled moan, one of the fighters dropped to the floor. Quinn hurdled over the last row of seats. He could make out the form of the fallen man and one who watched over him. The remaining two seemed to have fled.

Quinn surged forward. As he did so, the stooped figure straightened up. Holding a knife above his head, he had been about to sink it deep into his victim's body for the second time. But now he aimed it at Tony Quinn. The knife started down. It traveled only a few inches before a hand shot upward, grasped the wrist and gave it a savage wrench. The bone snapped and the knife fell to the floor.

The killer screamed in pain, fought loose and tried to escape through the chemical fog that blanketed the auditorium. Tony Quinn raced close behind, seized his shoulder and spun him around.

He snapped a hard fist to the killer's jaw. When the man staggered back, he followed up the blow, putting into it all the power he could muster. The killer crashed to the floor.

Quinn's face remained grim, though at least one of the spies wouldn't squirm through a rat hole to escape. The man would be unconscious for at least an hour, judging by the pain in Quinn's knuckles. It wasn't possible that he had recognized Quinn, either, for the fog seemed thicker than ever.

Quinn turned back and found his way to the injured man's side. As he turned the man over, he muttered a curse. It was Colonel Catlin! The stamp of death was already written on his features, although his lips moved and his eyelids trembled.

"Colonel!" Quinn said softly. "You know who did this. Tell me why you jumped out of your seat. Listen to me. It's the Black Bat, Colonel!"

That name seemed to penetrate Catlin's dying brain. He opened his eyes. Doubt shone in them until Quinn thrust his face close to Catlin's.

"Yes, I'm the Black Bat. I'm also Tony Quinn. You're the one man who knows my secret and I'm telling you only because you must trust me. Who stabbed you? What's behind all this?"

"I ... was ... fool. Complete fool ... should have ... known. I wanted ... to ..."

Catlin's body gave a shudder and his eyes began to glaze. Quinn's shoulders drooped as he let Catlin's body ease to the floor. For the first time in the existence of the Black Bat, Quinn had revealed his identity but that secret was now locked in the brain of a dead man.

What had Catlin meant by branding himself as a fool? Why had he jumped up so suddenly? There was no question in Quinn's mind but that Catlin himself set off the fireworks. The spies had acted to stop him. Quinn wondered how many more of the assembled officers had died. There was still a great deal of confusion, but someone had smashed windows and cold air was sweeping in to disperse the man-made fog.

QUINN vaulted the rows of chairs and returned to his original seat. He sprang into it, making sure there was no blood on his hands or clothing. Swiftly, he dropped the mask of blindness over his eyes again.

Two minutes later, Commissioner Warner came fumbling back. When he found Quinn, he heaved a great sigh of relief.

"I'm sorry I had to leave you, Tony. Something happened. The whole audience must have been matched man for man with spies. They threw some kind of glass bombs, which released a smoke that was so dense, nobody could penetrate it. We don't know if anyone has been killed yet, nor if the spies got clear. The fog is beginning to break up now."

Quinn looked anxious. "I should never have come here. I'm only in the way."

"Nonsense," Warner soothed. "If you had your eyes, Tony, you'd have been in there, battling away. I'm afraid I'll have to leave you again. I must see if those damned spies got away, or if they are still in the audience. You just sit tight and don't move for anyone. I'll be back."

The atmosphere had cleared now and Quinn's apparently sightless eyes watched the confusion. He could see Colonel Catlin's body near the platform, with Warner beside it. Quinn moved his head slowly, barely preventing himself from gasping in astonishment.

There had been over a hundred potential victims for the spies—yet Catlin was the only man who had been attacked! In the confusion, a dozen ranking officers could easily have been murdered. Why hadn't that happened? Could all of this have been done with only the death of Colonel Catlin in mind?

Quinn gazed steadily in the direction of the platform, wondering why nobody noticed the spy he had knocked out. Certainly the man couldn't have recovered his wits even sufficiently to crawl to some hiding place. Quinn knew perfectly well the power that lay behind his fists. That spy should still be there, sprawled out and surrounded by Warner's men.

Trent climbed up on the platform and shouted for order. The command in his voice stopped the panic near the exits, which were now completely blocked off by police.

"Gentlemen, please return to your seats! No one is permitted to leave until we have searched for the spies who instigated and carried out this murder. Yes, it is murder! Colonel Catlin is dead—knifed in the back. You can be certain that he will be avenged, gentlemen. From now on my association and I will actively campaign against these murderers who must obscure themselves in a fog to carry out their killings.

"All of you, please sit down! Look through your pockets for identification of some kind, and I warn you, it must be good. Those who cannot furnish it will be held until they are identified. It is an inconvenience, but it may trap some of the killers."

The audience returned to its seats. Warner, in full control of the situation now, posted his men at advantageous positions. Quinn noticed that they were all armed with sub-machine guns. Row by row, detectives studied the identifications presented to them by the people in the auditorium. Some were escorted out of the place, others were lined up against one wall for further questioning.

HE SAW that Captain McGrath was there,

working hard. The detective spotted Quinn and came over, dropping into the chair which Warner had previously occupied.

"I know just what happened here," McGrath said grimly. "It's enough to make an Eskimo's blood boil. Remember that I accused you of killing five men? Well, I take it back—not the fact that I think you're the Black Bat, mind you! But if you are, and you did kill those damned spies, I'd like to shake your hand."

"I don't mind shaking hands with you, Captain, but I insist that I am not the Black Bat."

McGrath's eyes narrowed as he came half out of his chair.

"Then how did you know it was me, if you can't see? Answer that one!"

Quinn allowed a faint smile to cross his lips.

"But Captain, you asked me that question under similar circumstances before. It so happens that a blind man learns to distinguish voices. I'd know yours at least a block away."

"Oh!" McGrath said, rather weakly, and dropped back into his seat. "Well, if you are the Black Bat, I'm telling you that all curbs are off. You're fighting these spies and I won't try to interfere. Understand? While this goes on, the Black Bat has a free hand, as far as I'm concerned. He can fight these rats the way they ought to be fought—with bullets!"

"I think you're perfectly right," Quinn said, "even if you persist in barking up the wrong tree. This is a time for all the forces of justice to band closely together. Trent was right. Everyone must fight this menace! Believe me, if I could use my eyes—if I weren't the crippled, helpless man that I am—I'd get into it, too. Good luck, Captain. I hope you round up these killers."

"I don't know, Quinn," McGrath sighed. "Sometimes I'd swear that you're the Black Bat. But other times, like now, I begin to think I'm nuts. Anyway, you know how I feel about this. Just sit tight. I'll send a couple of men to escort you out of here."

"I'll stay," Quinn countered. "I'm no different from anyone else here. I'll show my identification. Besides, this is all quite exciting for a blind man. I can't see, but I can hear and guess just what's going on. Thanks for trying to help me, Captain."

McGrath went back to work. Quinn turned his apparently sightless eyes around the large auditorium every few moments, searching for von Elkin. The Nazi spy would never get by with his faked beard and wig. He was trapped, might make a desperate attempt to get away.

Exactly what Quinn could do about that wasn't clear, even to himself. Without the masking fog of smoke, he was completely stymied.

CHAPTER XII

Face in the Window

GRADUALLY, the members of the audience were whisked out, for not one suspicious person had been found. Every man had either identified himself satisfactorily or sent for trustworthy citizens who could make the identification for him.

All the spies, including von Elkin, had made good their escape! But how? The front entrance of the building was crammed with an overflow audience. They certainly would not have permitted anyone to leave after those smoke bombs were set off. Warner, tired and hot, sat down beside Quinn.

"Well, they beat us to it again, Tony. Colonel Catlin is dead, and we haven't a single clue to his murderers. They created a fog of smoke and escaped through it. Of course, everything was set—exits prearranged skillfully. But you'd think one of those spies would have tripped up somewhere. I wish the Black Bat had been here. He has a way of handling situations of this kind. We can't hope for miracles, though, I suppose."

Quinn smiled. "You're hinting, Commissioner. Like McGrath, you have a vague idea that I'm the Black Bat, and now you're offering me a chance to operate. McGrath just did the same thing. I wish I were the Black Bat—not because I would then have the ability to see once more. That would be only a minor item now. I really could help in battling these spies, if I were the Black Bat.

"They're getting more daring every day. Victories in Europe make them more aggressive than ever over here. Triumph has undoubtedly brought additional members to their ranks. I'd like to go home now, if I may."

"Of course." Warner helped Quinn to his feet. "Silk has been clamoring like a madman outside. We couldn't let him in, obviously, and I sent word that I'd take you home. You have a good man there, Tony."

Warner led Quinn along the aisle, through the cordon of police thrown around the building and down the stairs to the sidewalk. Warner's official car was parked across the street. As they stepped off the curb, Philip Trent joined them, linking his arm under Quinn's free one.

"There's only one thing by which that murder may benefit us," he said earnestly. "It shows the people exactly what the whole nation is up against. All of us have been more or less tolerant of these openly foreign organizations. We've let them have their petty drills and rifle practice. We've passed some minor legislation against their uniforms and laughed at the crooks who usually led them into absurd mischief. But it's not mischief now. We must stop laughing and turn from the defensive to the offensive.

"It's my fervent hope that everybody begins to realize what is going on. They'll be wise in not trying to interfere personally, however, because they can take what just happened as a good example of the ruthlessness these men exhibit. I think ..."

Directly across the street stood Attorney Tolly, watching the trio approach Warner's car. Suddenly Tolly gave a shout of alarm and pointed up the street. Warner and Trent looked swiftly, saw a heavy car bearing down on them with its throttle wide open!

QUINN almost visibly restrained the impulse to look. He heard Warner's cry of fear and knew what was happening. Then Tolly came scooting across the highway. As he neared the trio, he went into a wild dive. His arms grabbed Quinn's legs and sent him crashing back. Warner and Trent, now freed of Quinn, made a mad surge out of the way. Careening crazily, the big car passed within six inches of the spot where Quinn lay, with Tolly sprawled at his feet.

Quinn had secured a brief glimpse of the driver of that murder car. He recognized the black wig and beard. Fritz von Elkin had made a deliberate attempt to run down the three of them. Just whom he meant to kill wasn't clear. Trent, perhaps, because of the savage manner in which he had attacked von Elkin's principles. It might also have been Warner, because he represented an organized fight against spies.

"What—what happened?" Quinn gasped as Tolly got up.

Warner and Trent rushed over and helped Quinn to his feet. Warner pumped Tolly's hand.

"That was a brave thing you did, sir. Trent and I were squarely in the path of that car, just a little fuddled, I think. You acted promptly and efficiently. You saved the life of a man who couldn't help himself. This is Tony Quinn. He's blind."

Quinn's hand was proffered, but only in the general direction of Tolly. The lawyer took it.

"I wondered why you didn't try to jump. And believe me, Mr. Quinn, you've got a couple of mighty good friends by your side. They seemed to be willing to risk their lives to protect your own. What I did was nothing, but I'm glad I happened to be around, anyway. My name is Tolly. I'm an attorney."

Warner led Quinn to his car after Tolly and Trent left. The police commissioner was obviously shaken by the episode, and a little disgusted when the police cars returned. No trace of the murder vehicle had been found.

"I've got to stick around," he told Quinn. "Things are happening so fast, I don't dare leave until the whole mess is cleaned up. I'm sorry that you were exposed to such danger. And, Tony, remember what I said about the Black Bat? If you should bump into him, I'd like to have him know just how I feel."

Quinn sank back against the cushions of the sedan.

"I'll keep my nose out of this, from now on," he said sadly. "I'm just in the way. Oh, don't try to tell me that's not the truth. What good can a blind man be? From what I heard, you nearly lost your life—you and Trent—trying to protect me. As for the Black Bat, I'd sell my soul to be in his shoes for just a few hours. I'm sorry to say that I doubt if he'll meet me or that I'll run across him. But if I do, I'll give him your message."

AS WARNER watched the car disappear down the street, he stood stroking his chin thoughtfully. There was a fixed notion in his mind that Tony Quinn really was the Black Bat. Warner had known Quinn for years, knew just how aggressive he'd been as District Attorney. The Black Bat fought exactly the same way, and the touch of this mysterious marauder of crime sometimes seemed identical with Quinn's former efforts.

Against those theories, though, was the word of a dozen competent eye specialists who had stated firmly that Quinn would never see again. Warner also recalled how that searing acid had burned so deep and so fast. He had been present at the scene, had witnessed the entire horrible affair. If money could have cured Quinn's sight, he would now have the use of his eyes, for Quinn was wealthy enough to spend almost any amount. He had spent a small fortune, too, but without an iota of success.

Warner shrugged his shoulders and decided that he and Captain McGrath were a pair of fools even to suspect that Quinn was the Black Bat.

In Warner's large car, Quinn sat rigid, holding his cane firmly. His face was without expression, but his brain worked furiously. For one of the few times in his life, he felt the unmerciful assault of doubt.

Had that careening car been meant to kill Trent, Warner or—Tony Quinn? Did someone suspect that he was the Black Bat? Was the spy ring going to concentrate on him as their greatest menace? Yet he knew that he had given himself away in no manner. His dual identity was just as secret as ever. He had never relaxed his pose of a blind man while he was Tony Quinn, and as the Black Bat he had worked under cover at all times.

Still, those doubts kept crawling around miserably in his mind. He didn't worry only for himself. There were Silk, Butch and Carol to be concerned about. Any man cunning enough to have determined the identity of the Black Bat, would also have run down those three people as the Black Bat's aides.

He thought of Major Rankin, too. He had been in the audience, yet apparently no attempt had been made on his life. Why? The spies had certainly tried to murder him before, and he had been at their mercy during that meeting. And how had von Elkin managed to get out of that building without detection? How had the ten or twelve spies accomplished the same thing?

Quinn kept tapping his cane gently on the floor of the car. That was the only betraying sign of his justifiable nervousness.

Silk was waiting at the house. Quinn had never seen him so worried. He drank the rye and soda which Silk had prepared and spoke in a low voice.

"We've got to watch our step, Silk. It's possible that someone knows I'm the Black Bat. I'm not sure, of course, but things happened to give me that idea. Perhaps I'm just growing too suspicious, but it won't hurt if we're careful. Later on, I want you to slip out and contact Carol and Butch directly. We can't trust the phone any longer."

Quinn shuffled slowly across the floor of his study, using his cane to make certain the path was clear. He sank into his accustomed chair in front of the fireplace. Silk dragged over a straight-backed chair, sat down and picked up the newspapers which he had placed on a small table.

"I'll carry on as usual, sir. I've already looked over the papers, and I'll tell you what I've learned from them. Early tonight, G-men conducted raids all over the country in a search for fifth columnists. They found nothing—nothing at all, sir! While the items don't mention this, I can read between the lines. The spies were tipped off, somehow!"

TONY QUINN nodded. "That's what makes it so difficult. They have people who are trusted in various high circles. They pick up information you or I could never hear. That's transmitted to their headquarters, where the little items from all over the land are assembled. Some especially clever mind goes over these and arranges the items to organize a concrete picture of what is to happen.

"But I promise you, we won't be idle any longer. I have one hope—Fritz von Elkin. He's a fugitive, so he must be holed up somewhere. I think I know where he is. You'd imagine that his taking refuge in the section where his kind of people live would be dangerous for him. It wouldn't. He'd be less conspicuous there than among those who don't speak as he does. So I'm going to invade that section and find him."

"But how?" Silk asked. "You can't travel around as the Black Bat and ask a lot of questions. Those people won't talk, even if they wanted to."

"I know, and that's where you come in, Silk. I'm going to take one of the biggest chances of my life. I'm going into that area without the hood and cape. It's up to you to find some way of covering these scars on my face. A pair of colored glasses, an old suit, a tin cup and cane will be my disguise. Dangerous? Yes, but there is no alternative. We can't just wait for those spies to hit again. Next time they may pull whatever big coup they have in mind. I want you to—

"Silk, be careful now! Someone just ducked past the window in the east wall. Fold the newspapers and don't show any sign of haste. Walk to the kitchen, pick up a gun on your way and go out. If you see anyone, grab him. Shoot if you have to."

Silk licked his lips nervously, but that was his only unusual reaction. "What if they take a shot at you through the window?"

"I'll have to accept that chance. Now get going."

Silk obeyed the orders explicitly. When he returned twenty minutes later, he had nothing to report.

"I searched the whole estate, sir, but there's no sign of anyone. Are you positive it wasn't a mistake? Some shadow or a branch of a tree—"

"There was no mistake, Silk. You know how my eyes function. Whoever it was, he took only a fleeting glimpse into the room. I had no chance to see his features, but I did hear his clothes catch on a bush. We're under observation, and not by a gang of small-time crooks. Slip through the tunnel and get Butch and Carol."

Silk nodded, stepped close to Quinn and unobtrusively slipped a gun into the pocket of the smoking jacket.

"If you see anyone else, let him have it," he advised.

Silk had a sudden thought.

"Say, McGrath must be prowling around again!"

Quinn tamped tobacco into his pipe, keeping his eyes fixed before him.

"I thought of that. I'll just make sure."

Quinn arose, walked sightlessly toward the telephone and slowly dialed McGrath's home by counting the holes with his finger. The detective-captain answered almost at once.

"This is Tony Quinn. I am calling because I want to warn you that I informed Commissioner Warner of your ideas concerning the Black Bat. He might ask why a respectable member of the detective bureau should agree to consort with a criminal like the Black Bat. Good night, Captain."

Quinn hung up slowly, shaking his head.

"It couldn't have been McGrath," he said softly. "Now hurry along, Silk. We've got to go into action immediately, before these spies really manage to put us out of action."

CHAPTER XIII

Changed Faces

FORTY-FIVE minutes later, when Silk returned, Carol and Butch were already in the laboratory Quinn had been seated in front of the fireplace all that time. Now he slowly arose, yawned hugely and stretched with great weariness.

“I think I’ll go to bed,” he told Silk. “You may lock up.”

Silk examined each window, making sure the latch was secure, and pulled the shades almost all the way down. After Quinn had made his way up the stairs to the second floor, Silk extinguished all the lights.

Then, in the darkness, Tony Quinn retraced his path. He avoided the furniture, kept as close to the wall as possible. Opening the secret door, he slipped inside. Silk remained upstairs, watching and listening. Carol ran into Quinn’s arms, as Butch watched.

“Tony, Silk told us you’re under suspicion! I had a feeling something like this would happen. Oh, Tony, what are you going to do? Can’t we help you?”

“I’m going to war,” Quinn said grimly. “And you can help, both of you as well as Silk. Here’s the idea. I’m forced to resort to a disguise—a simple one, but it ought to work. As a blind beggar, I’m going to look for von Elkin. You and Butch must keep me in sight at every second. If anything happens, Butch, you can wade in. I don’t care how many heads you break or how many jaws you dislocate. Silk is ready to act the same way. He’s getting the disguise material ready now. Meanwhile, Carol, did you learn anything about Major Rankin?”

“Plenty! I studied all the newspaper files on him and I asked a few questions in the right places. Major Rankin once served as military attaché to the United States Embassy in Berlin. He was constantly exposed to Nazi Kultur. Maybe some of it soaked in. Secretly he might have renounced his allegiance to our country and joined the Nazis. It’s happened before—in Norway, Denmark, Belgium and even France.”

Quinn whistled softly for a moment before he spoke.

“It does build up suspicion against the major. I never knew any of that before. Anything else?”

Carol nodded. “In checking up on Rankin, I discovered that one of his closest friends is a man named Roscoe Bell. He used to be an international economics expert before Hitler blew the continent wide open. Bell was in constant contact with the aggressive powers over there. He sold, or negotiated the sale of more oil and machine tools to Italy than any one in the United States.

“He’s welcome at the embassies of the Axis nations, and he’s an exceptionally clever man. I had a look at him.” She shuddered. “He’s got the kind of face that curdles milk—reminds you of a death’s-head.”

When Butch stirred angrily in his chair, it groaned under his immense weight.

“Say, Boss, lemme have a crack at him, huh? Ever since I shook that bag of bones who had me pinched, I been achin’ to slug one of the big rats. I’ll make him talk.”

“I think you could, at that,” Quinn laughed. “But the time isn’t ripe yet. Don’t worry, you’ll have a chance with those fists of yours. Here are my orders. Our lives might hinge on the way you follow them, so don’t miss anything. It’s after midnight now, but we can’t afford to wait. Our plans go into action immediately. They may require some time before things hatch out.

“Butch, loaf around the section I will indicate. Silk will follow me. Carol, have a fast car ready, and also keep Silk in view. In that way, we will never be out of sight of one another. If any of us disappear, the others will immediately start things humming.

“We’re to look particularly for Fritz von Elkin, but if we run across anyone else connected with the spy ring, that person will serve us just as well. What I’m aiming for is to locate their main hideout or meeting place. Sooner or later, the leader will put in an appearance to give his orders. Then we shall have him.”

CAROL AND Butch hurried away, to keep a rendezvous at the appointed spot. Quinn slipped back into the house, made his way to the second floor and found Silk getting the disguise material ready. As he sat down, Silk went to work.

“It won’t be such a good job, sir,” he said unhappily. “I’m no expert at this, but I think I can fill in those scars around your eyes. Maybe I can even turn you into a sallow-complexioned, glum sort of a man. Will that do?”

“Yes, I think so.”

Fifteen minutes later, Quinn looked at himself in a mirror and decided it certainly would do. Silk had used a light plastic material to fill in the acid scars, and then colored it to match the slightly dull complexion he had given Quinn’s face. A deft application of another substance gave the impression of a week’s growth of beard.

“I’ve been studying up, sir, so maybe it isn’t as bad as I thought,” Silk explained. “Got myself a few odds and ends for experiments, too. But I never thought I’d use them on you.”

Quinn removed his tweeds and donned an old black suit, which Silk had carefully rumpled and soiled in spots. A wrinkled shirt and an old, narrow tie completed the illusion. When he donned dark glasses and put on a battered hat, he nodded approval.

"I COULD face Captain McGrath and get away with it," he said. "There's no doubt that I'll fool men like von Elkin. You know, Silk, he cannot possibly be the leader of this group. I think Morino was killed by the real leader while von Elkin stood by. Then you heard von Elkin ask his master certain questions, which also eliminated him.

"I don't like the way Major Rankin has acted. First of all, he was kidnapped quite smoothly, and a neat trap was set for me. They knew I was watching him. That means they deliberately failed to kill him the first time, knowing I'd read the newspaper accounts, and get on Rankin's trail. But Rankin was the prisoner of at least eight or ten men. Yet he got away, and as far as I know, he never even made a report of the snatch.

"He was once subjected to Nazi influence, and no matter how I hate to suspect an officer of our Army, Rankin must fall under that classification. Then there's Attorney Tolly, who bailed out Butch's friend, Hofer. He had an office in the building where Morino was killed. He could easily have committed the crime and then given himself an alibi by going back to his office."

"But if he was the leader of the spies, and he also suspected that you were the Black Bat," Silk asked after a moment, "why should he risk his life to save you?"

"That I don't know. Perhaps it wasn't a serious attempt on my life. It may have been aimed at Warner or Trent. Or it may have been a ruse to find out if Tony Quinn really was blind. I almost gave myself away, Silk. Tolly shouted a warning, and he put plenty of expression in his voice. If I had turned my head and seen the car coming, I would have jumped for it. Then they'd have known I wasn't as blind as I pretended to be. So Tolly saved my life, or thought he did. Why? Was it to throw all suspicion off himself?"

Silk was putting on a disguise of his own while they talked. He changed his appearance to that of a much younger man, and his skin took on a healthy, tanned color. Silk was completely at home in this disguise. During the lush days of his confidence work, he had used it often, pretending to be a new arrival in a big city and wide open as prey for other slick confidence artists.

Quinn slipped back to the laboratory, stuffed a pair of guns in special holsters that gave no indication of a bulge. His hood and cape went into another prepared pocket. Then he went through the tunnel, reached the street and walked away briskly.

It was long after midnight when he saw Butch patrolling his assigned area. Carol was driving her car slowly over the section he had indicated. Silk appeared, too, after a short time. They continued operations until the hour became so late that they might have aroused suspicion. The Black Bat called off the hunt for that night, but he was glad of the experience he and his troupe had undergone. They had proved they could keep one another constantly in sight.

Late the following afternoon, Tony Quinn had two visitors—Commissioner Warner and Philip Trent.

"Glad you dropped in, gentlemen," Quinn said sincerely. "A blind man finds time heavy on his hands. All I can do is listen to the radio, and even the war news seems to lose its horror, eventually."

Trent laughed. "This isn't just a social call. We dropped in to see how you felt after that terrible experience last night. But we also want to solicit your help. Financially, I mean."

Quinn looked puzzled as he stared straight ahead.

"I don't get your point, but if you are seeking funds to combat this spy ring, name your own figure."

Warner looked questioningly at Trent.

"Remember what I said? Quinn may be blind as far as his eyes are concerned, but he can see and understand the menace that faces this nation. You've hit it on the head as usual, Tony. Trent has been raising funds from members of the Officers' Club and certain other important men. But even though they have been more than generous, he needs all he can get."

"We're going after that spy mob with every bit of power we can muster," Trent said. "But we don't intend to interfere with the Federal authorities. What we learn will be turned over to them for action. You see, some of the foreign people here have relatives in Europe, and they are under the control of the Gestapo or whatever other secret police agency those various nations operate. Those unfortunate people are compelled to obey orders from the spy ring.

"By providing sufficient money to get those relatives either to the United States or some other land where they can breathe in peace, we hope to break up this compulsion of unwilling aides to the spy group. It will take large sums, and I'm going on the air tonight in a plea for cash. It won't come in fast enough to suit our purposes, so I hope to interest fifty or more men who are willing to donate a thousand dollars each."

"Silk, my checkbook and a pen," Quinn called.

Silk brought them. After he guided Quinn's shaky pen onto the proper lines, he handed Trent the check.

"This will take a few people to safety," Trent said gratefully. "I'll let you know later just what happens. Thanks again."

Warner lingered a few seconds and spoke in a low voice.

"In your dreams you didn't see the Black Bat by any chance, did you, Tony?"

Quinn chuckled. "I'm afraid not, nor in my limited travels either. Anything new on the murder of Colonel Catlin, Commissioner?"

"Not a thing," Warner sighed. "I'd like to know how those men got out of that auditorium, but mostly I want to know why Catlin was knifed. My best men haven't been able to figure it out. It's keeping me busy, too, and I only took time out because Trent felt a little hesitant about coming to see you for a donation. He's got a smart idea there. It ought to help some. Don't miss his broadcast tonight, because he certainly intends to make the fur fly."

CAROL and Butch hadn't been idle. They reported before dinner, which Silk managed to serve in the laboratory. He had carefully drawn all the window shades before carrying the trays from the kitchen.

"I've worked on this man, Bell," Carol said. "Everything confirms my first suspicions. He's a sympathizer with those alien interests because United State neutrality laws have practically put him out of business. He can't export anything that's worth real money, like munitions. He visited Major Rankin at three-twenty, stayed in the suite for almost an hour, and then went directly to the section we were patrolling last night.

"He owns considerable real estate there, including several meeting halls used by Bunds and certain athletic societies that are patronized by men who have a real need for calisthenics."

"It ain't that," Butch put in with a broad grin. "They drink too much beer. I been around that section all day myself. Boy, they sure got good beer! Like you said I was to do, I followed Tolly around. That guy's business is plenty dead, if you ask me. But he spends a lot of time around the beer joints up there. They think he's a big shot. Everybody knows him. I even seen a couple of gents slip him that funny salute they tire out their arms with in Europe."

"All right," Quinn said. "We'll invade their stamping grounds again. Butch, as soon as you've eaten your usual three meals in one, go back there and wait for us. Carol, keep your car tank filled, and have it ready for a quick getaway. We may need it. Silk, you'd better get the stuff set for our disguises. I have a feeling we'll see action tonight."

CHAPTER XIV

The Disappearing Man

IN HIS disguise as a blind beggar, Tony Quinn lapped his cane noisily to add to the sum of thirteen cents he had obtained during the first two hours. He worked mostly around a big hall which had been prepared for a meeting.

At nine o'clock, a few men began entering it, but some of them looked around furtively before they climbed the steps. Others walked in boldly, boastful of the fact that they had been invited. Quinn frowned. This was going to be a big meeting, with well over two hundred in attendance. Certainly the clever leader of the spy ring wouldn't risk anything quite so open, even in a section inhabited by people of his own nationality.

As he passed the place for the fifth time in less than an hour, Quinn saw, through his dark glasses, something which aroused his interest. Men were going into the hall, but these made a sharp turn just inside the door and seemed to vanish.

A car pulled up and two men climbed out. The Black Bat recognized them instantly as some of the spies who had been in the auditorium where Colonel Catlin had met his violent death, Now he was certain an important meeting was to be held. He reasoned also that the assembly in the main hall was merely meant to quell any suspicion that a far more dangerous meeting was to be held elsewhere in the building. This area was well policed these days. Uniformed men and detectives constantly kept their eyes open for trouble.

The Black Bat kept tapping his cane and softly calling for alms. He saw two bulky, square-faced men emerge from the hall, descend the steps and start what seemed to be a patrol in front of the place. They saw the Black Bat, whispered to one another and then approached him. He recognized their type immediately. These were Gestapo agents, selected for their ability to keep cruel hands clamped around the throats of those who hated what they stood for.

One of them grabbed Quinn's shoulder. The other struck a match, whipped off Quinn's dark glasses and almost shoved the flaming match into his face. Quinn's eyes never flickered, for they had that dead stare of the blind. When the Gestapo agent blew out the match, Quinn began feeling around the sidewalk for his glasses.

"I ain't done nobody no harm," he whimpered. "Please don't take me in, Officer."

The two men looked at one another and winked. One of them kicked the dark glasses toward Quinn's hand. He picked them up fumblingly and put them on.

"Get away from here!" one of the agents warned harshly. "If I see you again, I'll break those glasses—and your arm! You are not wanted around here. Is that understood?"

"I—I'll go," Quinn whined. "But I got to eat. A blind man can't do no work to make money. He's got to depend on kind people, but I'll go. I don't want no trouble with the police."

Quinn turned around. Tapping his cane, he obediently went off. One of the agents nudged the other, stepped quietly behind Quinn and delivered a hard kick that struck Quinn's ankle. With a choked sob, he tapped his way painfully to the next corner and rounded it.

SILK WAS waiting in a doorway, his face livid with rage.

"I saw them do that, sir. With your permission, I'd like to take a crack at the rats."

"I'll take care of them myself," Quinn said grimly, "and in just a couple of minutes. They seem to think this is Berlin. Now listen carefully. The meeting upstairs in that hall is a blind. I think the real business will take place in the basement. There's an alley beside the building, and a side entrance which leads to the basement.

"My theory is that when the proper moment arrives, our mysterious spy leader will come in person to deliver his speech. If that happens, we'll have him. Contact Butch. Take him with you and slip down that alley. Warn Carol to be ready, because this will have to be worked with blinding speed."

Silk looked puzzled.

"But those thick-necked mugs who chased you away—they'll pounce on us like a pack of dogs."

"I'll clear the way for you," Quinn laughed. "Once inside the place, let Butch go to work on anyone who is in your path. Wait for me. I'll follow shortly, but when I enter, it will be on the heels of the spy master. Find Butch and Carol, and then watch me do a little angling. I'm really going to enjoy this."

Quinn waited until Silk gave him a covert signal that all was ready. Then he adjusted his glasses, tapped the cane briskly and turned the corner, heading straight toward the two Gestapo agents. When they saw him coming, they gaped in surprise. Quinn kept on until he started to pass them. But they seized him, dragged him across the sidewalk and shoved him against a brick wall.

"So, you are stupid, eh? You cannot follow orders. Well, one of these days, you and all your kind will be wiped off the streets. If I had my way, you would get death. You are an impediment to the rule that is to follow here. But because you have disobeyed, we shall teach you a lesson—a good lesson, *ja*."

The agent doubled his fist, stepped back a pace and swung hard. As the fist streaked toward his face, Quinn ducked. It struck the brick wall instead, drawing a cry of anguish from the Gestapo agent.

Quinn suddenly moved fast. He thrust out one arm that sent the second agent flying toward the gutter. Then he ripped off the smoked glasses and began running swiftly down the street. The two agents came rushing after him, but Quinn knew they'd never risk shooting at him. They would capture him, if possible, and then silently make sure he'd never talk by deliberately exposing himself as a fake blind beggar. Quinn knew they'd leave their posts and clear the way for Butch and Silk.

He skidded to a stop near the mouth of an alley two blocks away. Veering sharply, he picked up speed as he headed into its dark maw. Now the advantage was in his favor, for he could see perfectly in the gloom. The two agents followed down the alley, but they had to slow up, trying to find Quinn's shadowy form.

"A spy he is, and he dies!" one of them said in a hoarse whisper. "*Mein Gott,* if the Director knew how close he was to the meeting tonight! There must be a leak, eh?"

The agent turned his head. Instead of seeing his partner standing beside him, he saw an eerie form, made all the weirder in the darkness. For a moment he thought he had gone mad. He was staring at a huge figure with wings. Then recognition dawned, and one hand shot to his hip pocket.

"The Black Bat!" he whispered in horror.

HE GOT his gun half out of the pocket when the Black Bat's fist smashed him full on the nose. The blow hurled him back against the wall. Before he could shake the blood out of his mouth and eyes, the gun was wrenched from his hand, thrown far into the alley.

"You asked for this," the Black Bat said stonily. "Anybody who kicks a blind man around deserves the beating of his life, but you're doubly deserving of harsh treatment. Your kind is not wanted in this country. You gained admittance here by subterfuge. You threaten those who want to stay here and enjoy the freedom your own land does not provide. Get your fists up! You boast about physical prowess and 'strength through joy.' Enjoy this for a starter."

The Black Bat's gloved fist hit the Gestapo agent a slashing blow across the cheek. The agent stumbled and fell. The Black Bat grabbed his necktie and hauled him back to his feet.

"No! Do not strike me!" the agent whimpered. "I will give you money. I will go back to my own land. I will do anything you—"

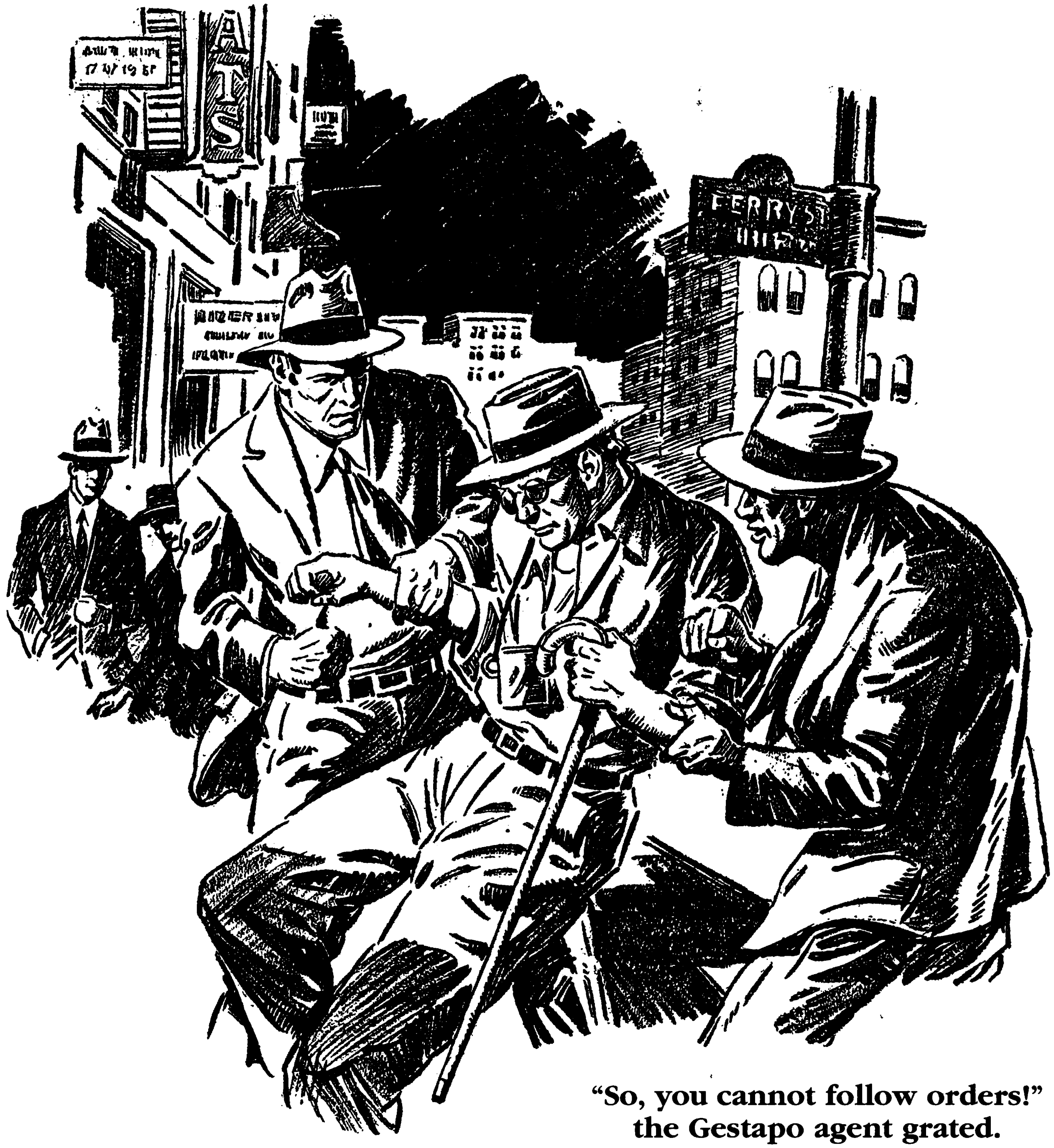
"Yellow!" the Black Bat said harshly. "Unless you've got some poor, half-starved victim under your whip, you're only half a man. You can hand it out, but you can't take it. Your kind never can, but you get it, anyway."

He held the agent at arm's length and drove a mighty punch straight to the chin. The agent went limp. Letting him drop, the Black Bat walked into the alley and found the second agent, who was beginning to moan and stir. The Black Bat slammed home another blow, wiped his hands as though they'd touched filth. Then he pushed both men into a small alcove used for garbage and ash cans. He propped them up and shielded them from view with the cans.

Then he hastily stripped off his hood and cape, put them away and donned his dark glasses and worn hat. After picking up his cane, he returned to the sidewalk and tapped along the street. As he neared the meeting hall, he saw the big doors close. A moment later, a sedan turned sharply and crawled down the driveway beside the meeting hall.

It stopped, the headlights winked out, and the door beside the driver's seat opened. A man stepped out. In the gloom he was just a shadowy blur, but the Black Bat's eyes saw that he was heavily shrouded in some kind of cape. He disappeared through the side entrance.

The Black Bat was after him quickly. Making sure no other guards were posted nearby, he changed to his hood and cape, and then entered a huge, faintly lighted room. He saw an electrical



"So, you cannot follow orders!" the Gestapo agent grated.

switchboard, curtains and ropes, and realized that he was behind a stage. Apparently, the basement of the building was used as a theater.

Then his eyes made out a form lying prone on the floor, near one corner. The Black Bat made only a cursory examination of the unconscious man. The lopsided jaw gave silent proof that Butch had been at work. Abruptly a hiss attracted his attention, and Silk came from behind a stage prop. When the Black Bat joined him, Silk whispered in his ear.

"We've got him. They're ready to hold a meeting and the big boy himself just stepped onto the stage. The only man on duty here is over in the corner. I think Butch all but killed him when he started to draw a gun. What shall we do now?"

"Butch is to take the left wing of the stage," the Black Bat replied softly. "You take the right wing, and I'll slide under the curtain in the middle. His nibs wore a big cloak. We've got to get that over his head so he can't see you or Butch. Then, after he's properly silenced, we'll perform a neat job of kidnapping. All set?"

"I've been set for days, sir. You give the signal."

THE Black Bat hurried to the center of the curtain. Dropping flat, he raised the curtain an inch and saw the feet of the mystery man. Gruff commands came from the small theater out front and then the intense lights were turned on. The Black Bat raised his hand, saw Butch and Silk waiting. He brought it down, sliding under the curtain at the same instant. All three of them converged on the cloaked leader. Butch's huge paw clamped across the man's mouth. Silk tripped him silently, and the Black Bat whipped the cloak over his head. He nodded to Butch. The big man rammed home a knockout blow, picked up the limp victim and retreated toward the wings, with Silk following.

The Black Bat slid beneath the curtain again. He ran to Butch's first victim and quickly slung him over one shoulder. He carried him onstage, propped him up against the curtain and plastered a Black Bat sticker on his forehead. Then he darted off the stage and out of the building.

As he left, he could hear the eager spies hailing the expected appearance of their leader. The Black Bat slipped off his hood and cloak as he raced up the driveway. Carol was waiting in the car, with the motor humming. Silk sat beside her and Butch was in back. Their victim was huddled in a heap on the floor. When the Black Bat got in, Carol quickly drove off.

"Head for Logan Park," he ordered. "It isn't patrolled, and it's dark there—just right for my interview with the big shot. And, Carol, that was slick work. You too, Silk—and you, Butch."

"Aw," Butch replied modestly, "that was nothin'. I never even made my knuckles tingle. That guy's jaw musta been cut outta putty. Say, Boss, do I get a crack at this baby? Just a little two-minute round?"

The Black Bat chuckled. "He's my meat, Butch, and I'll handle him with kid gloves until he talks. This has been one grand night's work. Silk, jump out at the next corner. Phone the F.B.I. and tell them where they can round up those spies in a hurry."

Carol turned into the park and stopped at the darkest spot she could find. As he got out, the Black Bat hauled his prisoner with him and spoke softly to his aides.

"Keep cruising around. When our pal wakes up, I don't want him to see your faces or hear your voices."

He carried the cloaked figure deep into the park, laid him down on the grass and knelt beside him. When he wrenched the cloak open, he groaned in disappointment.

The man they had kidnapped was Fritz von Elkin—the one man who couldn't possibly be the leader of the spy ring!

CHAPTER XV

Wave of Terror

OPENING HIS eyes, von Elkin stared, then instantly closed them and shivered violently. That hooded head and the cape told him exactly who had negotiated this kidnapping.

"I have done nothing," he moaned. "There is no reason why you should kill me."

"There won't be—if you talk." Von Elkin's eyes showed that he understood the quiet threat. "First of all, I want to know just why you were assigned to address that meeting. Isn't that the job for your leader?"

"I know nothing." Von Elkin sat up, rubbing his swollen jaw. "I received orders only an hour ago, and I obeyed them. I was to put on a cloak. Cover my face and go to the meeting. I was not told what to say, and under no circumstances was I to reveal myself to anyone. I swear that is everything I can tell you."

"Then let's take it from another angle," Quinn said. "When Morino was killed, you were in the same room. The man who murdered him fired through the doorway of your office. Who was the man who handled that gun?"

"Himme!" Von Elkin's eyes popped wide. "How do you know that? Even the police have not found out about it yet. You will not believe me. Anyway, if I talk any more, I will be killed. There is no difference, whether my death is at your hands or by the orders of my leader."

"I'm afraid you've got us all wrong over here, von Elkin. We don't torture or murder people to make them talk. Those customs we leave to barbarians. We'll let the law take its course. You may be convicted of murdering Morino. If you are not, then the worst possible punishment you can expect is deportation. We could send you back home by way of Japan, and even pay your fare."

"Send me—back—there?" von Elkin gasped in terror. "No! In the name of humanity, do not deport me! I will be killed at once for having failed. They will show no mercy. I'll tell you everything I know. Everything! The man who leads us is unknown to the entire organization. Whenever he addresses us, lights are thrown into our eyes, so we cannot see his face, though he can see us. His orders come by letter, by phone and by messenger.

"Yes, he did kill Morino. The poor fool had lost his nerve and was ready to confess to the police. Yet I did not see his face even that night. After killing Morino, he told me I could gain my freedom by going to the roof, jumping to the next building and using the side door to escape. A car was waiting for me. He had disappeared before I went to the roof."

"What are your leader's plans? What does he intend to sabotage and when?"

Von Elkin dry-washed his hands nervously.

"By answering that, I forfeit my life. Yet what can I do? The plans are ready. When the signal is given, our men will strike in every part of the country. They have machine guns, grenades—everything with which to kill and create terror. Sympathizers will feed them and store ammunition. Shipyards, factories, public buildings—all are to be destroyed. The plan is so huge that sometimes it makes me shiver."

"When does all this happen?"

"No one but the Director knows. He alone can give the signal. I swear that is the truth."

THE BLACK BAT reached under his cape and placed one of the perforated cards on von Elkin's knee.

"Read that. Tell me what it means."

Von Elkin had only to glance at the card to recognize it.

"Through these cards will come the signal. No one knows what they mean, but when the time comes, we will learn how to use them. The lieutenants distribute one to every member of the organization. I also have one."

Von Elkin reached toward his pocket, but the Black Bat gripped his wrist hard. From the spy's inner pocket, he brought out the card. Clumsily, von Elkin knelt, bent over the Black Bat's shoulder and pointed to the perforations.

"You see, that is what I mean."

Suddenly, he gave the Black Bat a vicious shove, sent him rolling over on the grass. The spy was on his feet in a flash, racing away into the darkness. He plunged headlong into tall shrubbery and kept running. He was shaking badly and sweating with fear, but he had escaped the Black Bat. Naturally, he could no longer return to the spy ring after what he had told. There was plenty of room to hide in this big country, though....

"All right, von Elkin. Put your hands up and come out of there. If you try to duck, I'll put a bullet through you."

Terrified, von Elkin saw the Black Bat standing ten feet away.

"Ach!" he cried. "You are not human! You found me in this darkness. It is not possible!"

A gun that pressed against his ribs told him it was indeed a fact. He offered no resistance. He was thoroughly beaten, and he knew it. This black-garbed figure was even more frightful than the Gestapo, or the sinister voice of the Director.

Von Elkin was quickly bound with his own necktie and belt. The Black Bat slung him across one shoulder and marched back toward the car. As he neared it, he threw the cape over the spy's head. Butch was waiting to stow the prisoner into the car.

DETECTIVE-CAPTAIN McGrath came home late. His wife was away and he preferred to work overtime rather than sit home all alone. After he put his car away, he walked around to the front of the house and let himself in. The instant he snapped on the living room lights, he jerked erect in surprise.

Strapped to one of his big chairs was Fritz von Elkin, his mouth gagged. A note had been pinned to his vest. McGrath read it in amazement.

Compliments of the Black Bat, Captain. Here is Fritz von Elkin, in whom you and the FBI are greatly interested. He doesn't know much and I've already milked him dry of all the information he could give. He did not murder Anton Morino, but he is a self-confessed spy and his name will look good on your records.

McGrath went to the phone and called the local offices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Twenty minutes later, two G-men were clamping handcuffs on von Elkin.

"Nice work, Captain," one of them said. "We certainly wanted this man badly."

Dismally, McGrath shoved the Black Bat's note toward the two men.

"Don't thank me. The Black Bat did it. I'm just a go-between."

"Honestly and sincerely spoken," a voice stated from the back of the room.

Everyone whirled. The Black Bat stood just inside the door, an automatic gripped in his hand.

"I'm sorry I had to startle you," the Black Bat apologized. "I wasn't sure McGrath would listen to me, and I really needed a representative of the F.B.I. to hear what I have to say. Sit down, gentlemen. Shall we declare a truce for the moment? After all, we all work on the same side of the fence in this particular case."

"You've got my word that I won't try to nab you," McGrath grumbled.

"And ours," one of the G-men added quickly. "In fact, we have orders to give you a free hand. Before Colonel Catlin died, he notified the Department that you were at work on the case. He was a little proud that even you didn't know he was in active service again. Catlin had been assigned to Military Intelligence several months before. I think they killed him because he had learned too much."

The Black Bat walked over to von Elkin and stripped off the gag.

"How about it? You were in the meeting hall when Catlin died. You may even have been the man who killed him. Why was he murdered? What was he trying desperately to say?"

"I did not kill him! None of us knows who did it. We had orders to capture him, but not to kill. I do not know why he was murdered. You must believe me! I am telling the truth."

"SO Catlin was on active service with Military Intelligence." The Black Bat balanced himself on the corner of McGrath's living room table. "That puts a new light on the subject. Those others who died—apparently by accident, or in the course of a hoodlum robbery—what about them? Were they on active service, too?"

"We don't know," the G-man answered. "This is the first time anybody claimed those men were murdered."

"Well, they were. Here is what I want to say. The spy ring is big—far more enormous than you probably believe. Its tentacles stretch into every city in the nation. They are well armed, and already have sympathizers prepared to hide them and to secrete ammunition. In effect, they intend to perform as the parachute troops did in Belgium and Holland— to destroy and terrorize.

"Contact your Washington office and prepare them against this shock. Men must be ready twenty-four hours a day to operate from every branch office you have. They are to be completely armed and augmented, if necessary, by regular Army men. This is no crackpot scheme. It's war on a modern scale.

"If the spies succeed, the whole program of the United States is bound to be delayed, with disastrous results. If my plans carry through, I shall flash word to your Washington offices when and where to strike. We may be able to gather the whole ring into one net."

"As far as we're concerned," one of the G-men said, "those are orders. We'll hike von Elkin to our local office and grill him. He may spill something he forgot to tell you. I'll get in touch with Washington and have the arrangements made. Nothing will be left undone. You can depend on us."

"I am," the Black Bat said grimly. "So are a hundred and thirty million other people." He arose and backed toward the door. "Do you know anything about the raid I ordered on the spy meeting?"

"It was a fizzle," a G-man said. "We found nothing but two hundred men all singing the 'Star Spangled Banner' and getting ready to close their meeting. They had resolved to fight for democracy."

"I was afraid of that," the Black Bat said. "Did you search the basement?"

"Yes. All we found was a stage-hand who said some burglar had slugged him. But there was a short-wave radio on the stage, too. We looked it over. It couldn't get messages from any great distance and all the sending apparatus had been removed."

The Black Bat nodded. "Take good care of von Elkin. You might give him a drink. He looks as though he needs one. Good night, gentlemen."

The door closed softly, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

Attack in the Dark

RETURNING to the car, the Black Bat got in beside Carol. "Drive back to the house," he ordered. "Butch, you get your wreck of a car over to the corner of White and Damon Streets. Park it there, and then go back to your boarding house."

After Butch was dropped off, Carol drove to the neighborhood of the address the Black Bat had given Butch. She parked on a lonely side street.

"Can I help, Tony? I feel as though I'm just an ordinary chauffeur."

"Not at the moment. But I'm working on an idea, and you'll be more than useful in it. Right now I'm going to pay Fritz von Elkin's hideout a visit. I learned the address from some papers he had on him. Von Elkin may have been holding back. I'm not sure, but I think he may have been one of the men who fought Colonel Catlin just before he was stabbed.

"The smoke was pretty thick, yet I'm reasonably certain he was hanging onto Catlin. He'd deny that, not because of his vast faith in the totalitarian regime which controls his life, but as a matter of self-preservation. He doesn't want to be suspected of murder. Go back to the house and wait for me in the lab. Silk should be home by now, and we can have a council of war."

She turned toward the hooded and caped figure at her side.

"Tony, this is the greatest thing you've ever done. It's more important than running down crooks and murderers. I'm proud that I had something to do with the origination of the Black Bat."

"I'm just grateful," the Black Bat held her hands, "for a kind Providence that turned you my way—not because you brought back my sight That's incidental. But it allowed me to know you. Some day our task will be completed and the Black Bat will retire. That day will mean that you and I can be together as long as we live. Providing, of course, that you want it that way."

"I do, Tony. I do! That's why I worry so much when you're prowling around, especially when you work against these monsters. Even if they only suspect that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat, they may think it necessary to murder you. I—I've never really been afraid before, but I am now."

"I know," the Black Bat said softly. "It has affected me the same way. But, Carol, if we fail, a great number of people will die. There's no telling what will happen if that gang gets the upper hand. I'd willingly lay down my life to prevent it, yet you can rest assured I'm not going to take foolish chances. Those men will give no mercy, and they can expect none in return. I'm beginning to understand all that has happened so far. The chase may be nearly ended. Now, go back and wait for me. This particular job is plain routine."

The Black Bat left the car, darted across the sidewalk and invaded the spacious yard of a large house. He watched Carol disappear around the corner before going on. Through the inky darkness, he crossed other yards without blundering into anything that might give an alarm.

Scrutinizing the house in which von Elkin had been hiding, he wondered how the spy had ever managed to afford to live there. The house was an old-fashioned affair, with gables and turrets, and there were even blinds outside the windows. Some of these had been shut.

Warily, the Black Bat approached the rear door. For all he knew, a dangerous number of spies might be holed up there. The ordinary lock on the door gave to his skill in less than a minute.

HE walked across a kitchen, saw opened tin cans strewn around, and dirty dishes and pans in the sink. He opened a cupboard and looked at the supply of food. There wasn't much—certainly not enough to feed many men.

In the middle of the dining room, he stopped and listened. His sensitive ears heard a faint creak, but no other sound. The creak might have originated in the structure of the house itself, for the place was old. The Black Bat walked noiselessly into the huge living room, drawing a gun as he entered. His search of the room revealed nothing of interest. A study and a library at the rear of the house were just as unproductive of evidence.

Returning to the reception hall, he climbed the wide staircase cautiously, grateful for the silence which his crepe-soled shoes insured. There were several bedrooms and a sewing room on the second floor. Only one door was closed, apparently leading into one of the bed chambers. He turned the knob swiftly, flung the door wide. His gun came up, ready for battle. But nothing happened. The same grim silence still gripped the whole house.

When the Black Bat stepped into the room, he knew it held what he sought. On a small dressing table was von Elkin's disguise—the black wig and the beard.

He saw a desk in one gloomy corner and approached it. Before he started to examine the contents of the drawers, he looked down at the wastebasket. It was half full of crumpled papers, among which were the yellow pieces of a torn telegram form.

The Black Bat bent down and picked up a scrap of the yellow paper. It contained only the date of the wire, stated that it had originated in Washington, D.C., and following this was the telegraph company's code numbers. He impressed them on his mind, for the wire might be important, especially since it came from the nation's Capital. There was a chance that it might reveal some spy with his nose stuck deeply into Government business.

For one brief instant, the Black Bat was not on guard. All his attention was centered on picking the scraps of the ripped telegram out of the basket and assembling them.

When he heard a soft step behind him, he started to arise. Abruptly, his cloak was thrown over his head. The Black Bat was really blinded. A hard blow knocked the gun out of his hand before he could pull the trigger. He moved away quickly, trying to drag his engulfing cape down so he could see. There was no chance of accomplishing this, for the mysterious marauder worked fast.

He rocked the Black Bat with a hard punch to the chest, directly above the heart. Another slammed painfully into the pit of his stomach. The Black Bat had to give way under the attack. Each time he tried to remove the cap, another blow landed.

Suddenly, he realized that the attacker was deliberately forcing him back in a certain direction. That instant, he felt an open window behind him. He made one last frantic effort to land a wild punch, but it missed. That was his last chance. Two strong arms lifted him and thrust him through the window.

THE Black Bat felt himself slipping, sensed that his attacker had stepped back for a kick or a final punch. The Black Bat suddenly relaxed, but his two hands shot out. One of them seized the top of a sturdy blind.

When the last attack came, he was shoved completely through the window. He managed to hang onto the blind with one hand, and reach for his second gun with the other. Whipping it out, he fired two quick shots through the window.

He heard a snarled curse; the sound of furniture being tipped over. Again he fired, and then hastily removed the cape from around his head. He could see now, but the room was empty. The door was closed and a fire burned furiously in the waste-basket.

The Black Bat swung onto the sill and dropped back into the room. The papers were already almost consumed by the fire, but he turned the waste-basket upside down to smother the flames. Snatching up the gun that had been knocked out of his hand, he darted toward the door. He flung it open and leaped out onto the balcony overlooking the reception hail.

Three guns burned a deadly greeting. The Black Bat leaped aside, saw a trio of spies half hidden by doorways on the floor below. His automatic spat once. A spy fell out of the doorway like a log of wood. The other two were shooting fast, but the darkness impeded their aim. It had no effect on the Black Bat's marksmanship, however. He nailed another with a bullet between the eyes. The third man gave a startling scream. He ducked out of sight, and the Black Bat heard him racing toward the back door.

None of those three had been his attacker, the Black Bat felt certain. The man who had seized him had owned thick arms and the great strength of a powerful body. For some reason he was sure that he had tangled with the real leader of the spy ring. Therefore, that telegram must have been vitally important. The Black Bat raced down the steps. As he neared the bottom, the front door opened. His gun came up with the speed of lightning.

He let it sag, for Butch was standing in the hall, trying to penetrate the darkness. Under one arm he carried a limp figure. The Black Bat's hopes surged high when he saw that. Butch may have accidentally nailed the leader.

"Butch!" the Black Bat called softly. "Put him down. Where'd you get him?"

"I was just parkin' the car when I heard shots," Butch explained. "So I kept on drivin', and I saw this baby runnin' like mad. I jumped out, and he argued with me a little, so I conked him. Did I do wrong, Boss?"

"Put him on the floor," the Black Bat said. "I want to take a look."

Butch obeyed by simply letting his burden fall. The Black Bat turned the man over, saw a piggish face, a partially bald head and a thick neck. The Black Bat had never seen this man before, as far as he knew.

He heard tires grit along the driveway, raced to a window. A sedan was turning crazily out of the drive and onto the road.

"Butch get in your car and trail that sedan. Don't lose it! Phone Silk just as soon as you find out where it's going. Step on it!"

"Okay, Boss." Butch started for the door. "But if I was you, I'd lam outta here. Boy, them shots were louder'n bombs."

LEAVING Butch's victim on the floor, the Black Bat hurried back to the room where he had fought for his life. Hastily he turned the waste-basket over. He groaned, for every scrap of paper had been consumed by the flames. But he didn't waste time in searching the desk. If it had contained anything of value, the unknown attacker would have destroyed or taken it.

The Black Bat rushed down to the thick-necked man, who was beginning to come out of unconsciousness. After looking out the front door to make sure no police cars were pulling up, the Black Bat lifted the heavy man. Without too much exertion, he carried him through the house, out the back door and behind the garage. He let the man down and slapped his face gently until he fully awakened.

"Don't make a sound," the Black Bat warned. "When you talk, speak in a whisper and speak fast. I'm in no mood to argue, either. Who are you? What were you doing in that house?"

"It's my house," the man answered, with a frightened look in his eyes. "I'm Roscoe Bell. I own it. I was just coming home when some giant jumped out of the darkness and that's all I remember. I suppose that must have been you. What's the idea of a mask and—wait a minute. You're the Black Bat! What do you want with me? I can't tell you anything about crooks."

The Black Bat started. Butch had captured Rankin's friend—the salesman of death weapons!

Sirens were howling in the distance. The Black Bat was in an uncomfortable spot, for he had no car, and the police were bound to throw out cordons as soon as they found two dead men in Bell's house. Even though he might be allowed his freedom and not be unmasked, there would be dangerous delays.

"This time I'm not interested in crooks—of the average kind," he stated. "I'll be back. Don't forget that, and if I were you, I wouldn't try to leave town."

The Black Bat stepped away and faded into the darkness. Instantly Bell began yowling for help. He saw radio cars pull up and disgorge uniformed men. "It's the Black Bat!" he yelled. "He went this way."

Bell pointed frantically, but the sergeant who stepped up didn't even look in the direction Bell indicated. Two of his men ran into the house. An instant later, they shouted their finding of the two dead men.

"So the Black Bat was here, eh?" the sergeant said. "That's okay, but not for you. My hunch is that he came here to run down some evidence you have. So we'll all go down to Headquarters and have a little talk with the commissioner. Maybe you can explain those two stiffs in the house, huh? Don't start yapping right now. Stick out your mitts, brother, and find out what bracelets feel like."

Bell's eyes glittered in hatred.

"You have no right to arrest me. I know nothing about any dead men in my house. I was on my way home when the Black Bat knocked me out. I warn you, there'll be a civil action if I'm taken to Police Headquarters."

"Yeah, I've heard that before," the sergeant said wearily. "Now, are you coming quietly or must I see if my gun butt is as good as the Black Bat's fist?"

CHAPTER XVII

Stealthy Visit

NO MORE than a minute was needed for the Black Bat to find a dark spot and remove his cape and hood. He took the soft, floppy-brimmed hat out of an inner pocket and donned it. Then he started for home by devious routes which would not take him near too much traffic. He had to risk the possibility of being detected only because he was forced to.

In a quiet section of the city he drew down the brim of his hat and walked into a drugstore. He bought a package of cigarettes and then went to the phone booth. Quickly he dialed Captain McGrath's home.

"This is the Black Bat," he said. "I need your help badly. A telegram from Washington was in the possession of certain people neither of us likes. I'll give you the office and the code number. Maybe you can get a copy. Can you get it in twenty minutes?"

"I'll get it, if I have to blow open the doors of that telegraph office," McGrath promised. "The truce we agreed on is still effective. Call me back. Don't worry about my tracing the call."

"I won't," the Black Bat chuckled. "You tried that often enough before and never succeeded. But I'll take your word, Captain. Here are the numbers."

He gave them and then left the drugstore without attracting attention. Long ago, he had learned never to be conspicuous by acting furtive. He held his head high, though that revealed his scars. Twenty minutes later—from a cafeteria phone booth—he called McGrath again.

"I had them read the wire to me over the phone," McGrath said. "It's addressed to Colonel Catlin and it says: 'Nests closing before net is drawn. Look for leak. Has word spread around about this?'"

"Thanks," the Black Bat said. "It helps a lot. Maybe we'll have a neat little package of spies wrapped up for you in a few hours. Did von Elkin talk?"

"He clammed up the minute you left. The only thing that guy is scared of is the Black Bat. Good luck on your hunting. I with you'd take me along."

"And have you break every law on the rule books?" the Black Bat laughed. "You'd never live it down, Captain. I admit you really would be helpful, but it just can't be done."

The Black Bat slipped through the garden gate of his home without being seen. As he entered the tunnel, he breathed easily for the first time in what seemed to be hours. He had noticed that Butch's car was parked in its usual place. Butch, therefore, had returned. The Black Bat was eager to find out where the spy had driven.

They were all waiting anxiously for him. Silk prepared a quick lunch while Butch reported what he had done.

"I follow the guy out of the city. He turns up a road like the kind they have on farms. I park and go up, too. I see this guy drive through a big gate. When I sneak closer, I see a lot of guys in funny looking uniforms, and they keep sticking their arms out at one another. Then I scrammed. The road he turned off on is just past a big billboard and a heap of sand that's gonna be used when the roads get slippery. It's a pipe to find."

"Carol," Quinn said, "you and Silk go to work. I want that place completely investigated, it sounds like one of the Bund camps, so be careful. Find out how many men are there. See if you can determine whether they are armed, and if they intend to stay there all night. This business is getting ready to break and we must blow it to pieces before they have a chance to act. At exactly one o'clock in the morning, either be back here or phone. I'll wait until then. If I don't hear from you, I will assume you need help."

SILK WAITED only long enough to put on the disguise he had used when the spy ring captured him in Morino's house. After he and Carol left, Quinn finished a sandwich in two bites. He replaced the guns in his holsters with fresh weapons and handed one to Butch.

"You may need it. Sometimes fists and strength aren't enough. Bring your coupé to the garden gate and wait there for me."

Quinn spent about ten minutes looking over the sheaf of perforated cards again. Here in his hands lay the possible means of unmasking every spy nest, preventing them from opening a murder drive all over the country. Did they really mean what he was beginning to suspect? He shrugged. That was a question that only time could answer. He put them away.

Glancing at his watch, he saw he had plenty of time before the deadline he had set for Carol and Silk.

When he came through the tunnel, Butch was parked and waiting. Quinn climbed in and gave several precise directions that brought them to one of the best parts of the city. Not quite a suburb, nor actually a section of town, it offered the prospective tenant the choice of an apartment or a whole house—both at remarkably high prices.

"We're going into that brick house," Quinn said. "I want you to come just in case my opinion is wrong."

"Are we gonna grab the big shot?" Butch asked hopefully.

"I hope not. Capturing him would only bring the day of attack closer. He'd find some way of sending out word and then all hell would break loose. Follow me. I'll warn you when there is anything in your path."

"Okay," Butch agreed. "Say, it sure must be something to see in the dark. Just like a cat, huh?"

"That's exactly how we must work—like cats," Quinn warned. "If anyone is in the house, we must leave without making a sound. There are to be no heads broken this trip."

Ten minutes later, the Black Bat and Butch stood in a small study. The walls were lined with books, most of them concerning military tactics. The Black Bat quietly searched the place before he did any actual investigating. When he knew the house was empty, he returned to the study where Butch waited.

Seeing a glass trophy case on the mantelpiece, he stepped up to it. Butch could only see a blur, while the Black Bat's eyes made out everything as clearly as though it were day. The trophy case contained a forty-five Army automatic and an officer's sword. Mounted on a velvet background were the shoulder insignia of a major of the United States Army.

"Stay near the door," the Black Bat whispered. "If anyone comes near, be ready to go through the rear window. I'll open it now."

Butch nodded and moved to obey the orders. The Black Bat walked to the rear wall of the room, raised a window and swiftly peered around outside. He frowned deeply under his black hood. Just outside the window was a projection of wall about two feet thick. In the room itself though, there was nothing like an alcove to account for that bulge. He stepped up to the wall and removed his black silk gloves. Slowly, he passed his extremely sensitive fingers over the wall.

He spent fifteen minutes at this painstaking task, but it brought results.

Suddenly, his fingertips encountered a slight lump in the wall. He manipulated it experimentally. With a whir, an electric motor went into operation and a four-foot section of wall silently slid back.

Revealed clearly before him was a closet like room, not more than two feet deep. A shelf occupied part of this space, and a number of leather-bound volumes were neatly stacked on it.

He removed one, saw that it was a diary, almost twenty-eight years old. As he glanced at a few of the pages, he gave vent to a whispered exclamation. Then he deliberately tore one of the pages out of the book.

After he replaced the volume, he studied a number of maps that were tacked to the hidden wall. They were ordinary route maps given away by filling stations, but there was one for each state. They had been carefully drawn into oblong sections, so that each entire map was divided.

The Black Bat stepped back, made the door slide into place again. Then he went directly to the desk in the middle of the room. Sitting down, he opened the drawers and removed a number of hand-written documents. As he studied these, he was comparing them with the page he had ripped out of the old diary. His eyes could follow every word, every stroke of the pen or pencil, even though the room was so dark that Butch was blinking blindly.

Carefully he replaced the papers he had taken from the desk. He arose and strode without hesitation to where Butch stood guard.

"I'm going upstairs, so keep your eyes and ears open. I'll be gone only a couple of minutes."

He headed straight for the master bedroom, which was easily identified by the lavish furniture it contained. He appropriated a towel from the bathroom, using it to wrap around certain objects. Then he hurried down and closed the window in the study. With Butch closely following him, he left the house. The only evidence of their visit was the absence of a towel. That was hardly apt to be noticed, and the objects he had taken had not often been used.

Butch drove him to another part of the city, where the Black Bat ducked into a yard. He unloosened the knot in the towel-wrapped bundle he carried. Lashing this to his wrist, he climbed a rear porch pillar. He reached the sloping roof and crawled over it to a partially opened window. It was no difficult trick for him to open it without making a sound. Then he slipped into a bedroom and turned on a lamp.

Commissioner Warner jumped erect, grabbing wildly under his pillow for a gun. Then his sleep-laden eyes made out the black-caped figure that stood beside his bed. He relaxed with a sigh of relief.

"Sometimes I think I ought to hang a badge on you and let you work openly," he complained. "Then you won't scare the wits out of me on your midnight visits. What's up? Did you get anything on the spy ring?"

THE Black Bat placed his towel-wrapped bundle on Warner's bed.

"Inside this package you will find certain articles which should be covered with fingerprints. They are things that my suspect won't miss immediately. Have those prints brought out and then take a plane to Washington. Check the prints with every bureau available, although I think that perhaps Military Intelligence will have some information on them. Get back here as quickly as possible and wait for me to contact you."

Warner placed a hand exploringly on the bundle.

"So you've rounded him up, eh? I wish I knew how you managed to do it. I've got over eighteen thousand men working for me, and not even one of them could get anything on this spy case."

"They must adhere to laws," the Black Bat laughed. "I don't. I have no rule book to consult every time I want to go into action. It gives me an advantage, you see. Now, I think you'll be back by mid-morning, or early afternoon at the latest. Those prints must be checked, so happy hunting in the fingerprint files in Washington."

The Black Bat moved toward the window and abruptly vanished as Warner rubbed his eyes. Swiftly, he swung his feet over the edge of the bed and started to get dressed. The Black Bat rarely called for help, but when he did, that aid was always of vital importance. No one knew this more than Warner.

An hour later, a Police Department plane was carrying him quickly toward the nation's Capital.

CHAPTER XVIII
Zero Hour

EVEN AS the Black Bat was prowling the darkness, Carol and Silk reached the camp which Butch had described. They left their car hidden in the brush and walked beside the narrow lane until they saw an arch and a high wire fence surrounding the whole camp. The sign on the arch was intended to identify the place as an outdoor trap shooting club. There were two men standing just inside the gates. Each casually held a rifle in the crook of his arm. Carol tugged at Silk's sleeve.

"Butch was right," she whispered. "It's nothing more than a blind for an armed training camp. Silk, we've got to get inside somehow, and find out how many men are assembled here and why they are gathered at this time of night. I understand a little German. If they talk, I may be able to translate enough to help us. It's your job to find out how to get in."

Lying flat on his stomach beside Carol, Silk looked at the high mesh fence and shook his head. "There's only one way to get inside. We've got to circle the place until we find a tree with a branch that hangs over the fence. And watch yourself; Carol. Those steel wires may be charged. I'd be willing to bet on it."

They crept back into the protection of the forest that surrounded the camp. Silk climbed a tree. Using its uppermost branches as a lookout station, he studied the area as well as he could in the dark. The Black Bat's eyes were badly needed just then. But Silk managed to sight the outline of a tall tree a few hundred feet to the left. Its thick boughs hung far over the fence.

Silk noticed patrols pacing alertly just inside the camp. Entering the place might not be so difficult, but getting out would be another story. It was certainly too dangerous for Carol. Silk crawled down to rejoin her.

"I see a way in, and I'm going to take a chance. Let's suppose I were the Black Bat. Would I let you go along?"

"You wouldn't, but I'd go, anyway," Carol stated. "Don't think you can talk me out of going."

Silk shook his head. "If we're both caught, how will we let the Black Bat know? Look, you stay here. Be ready to run for the car at the first sign of trouble. If they get me, I'll make plenty of noise. Can't you see that's the only way we can do it?"

Carol gave in to Silk's persuasion, but with bitter reluctance. She followed him to the large tree, watched him crawl out over the limb and finally drop safely on the ground within the fence.

Silk was now on extremely dangerous ground. If they caught him, he'd be killed just as surely as dawn would come in a few hours. He glanced over his shoulder at the big tree which had offered him entrance.

Silk made a wry face, cursing himself for being a fool. There were dozens of other trees that were just as tall and almost as near. But the overhanging branches of those trees had carefully been lopped off—leaving only the limb by which he had entered. Had that been done deliberately? Was this particular section specially patrolled? Were the members of this devil's organization all around him now?

SILK drew a gun and kept on going. There was nothing else he could do. He saw a clearing with a dozen long, low barracks arranged to form a rude circle, with their entrances all facing a large drill grounds. Enough light came through the windows to let him see the uniformed men who strutted around, saluting one another.

He wondered uneasily when camps like these would be outlawed and their members closely questioned. In almost any European country, such a Bund would have been smashed with bullets.

Those who survived would have been granted the privilege of dying more slowly in a concentration camp. That must not happen here, he swore.

Silk did not have the hearing of the Black Bat, nor those uncanny eyes that could penetrate the most intense darkness. He could only keep constantly on the alert.

He reached a spot as close to the parade grounds as he dared, when suddenly a car came swiftly through the gates. Two men stepped out. Barked commands brought the camp members into straight, precise lines. They stood at attention while a man in civilian clothes gravely marched along the ranks, holding in his hands a small package of perforated cards. He handed one to each man, then stepped back a few paces and drew himself up as erect as a protruding stomach would let him.

"So," he said sternly, "we are ready. The day has come. By this time tomorrow, we shall be in control of great areas of this stupid country. There will be blood spilled. Some of you may die, but that is a glorious death, and you should court it. Show no mercy. Those are the orders of our Director. The cards have been distributed all over the nation.

"Those who receive them know what to do. You, too, have received those same instructions, but they are not to be acted upon until the zero hour—nine-thirty tomorrow night. Before then, you must strip the secret arsenal. The job has to be complete when you leave here at dawn. Munitions will be available in large quantities elsewhere, but we will need every bit of it we can find. Refuge has been arranged for us, if we do not succeed. But we shall, of course."

Silk gulped and broke out in a cold sweat. This information was absolutely vital to the Black Bat's plans. Silk wanted only one more thing—to identify beyond question the man who had issued those orders.

Taking a desperate chance, he crawled behind one of the barracks. As the pompous leader went back to his car, he crossed directly in front of the headlights. Silk got a good look. He didn't recognize the man, but he memorized every detail of his features and build.

Silk retreated slowly and cautiously. The ranks had broken up, and the men were probably spreading out all over the camp. If he ran into a patrol, the whole game would be lost. He neared the section of fence over which he had crawled. It was possible that all the guards had been temporarily withdrawn so every man would be in ranks when the final orders were given. Now they'd be coming back.

He crouched, looked around and then started to sprint toward the fence. He wasn't worried so much about his own safety He had to deliver to Carol the message he had for the Black Bat. Silk realized that devastation would scorch the whole nation if he failed.

FOUR MEN suddenly came running to intercept him. Silk's gun roared. One of the men stumbled, fell and didn't move again. The other three ducked for cover, began shooting at the same time. Silk risked everything on a dash to the fence. There he knelt to hold them off. Carol was just outside, well concealed by the darkness.

"Never mind me," he panted in a low voice. "Tell the Black Bat that zero hour is nine-thirty tomorrow night. Those cards were handed out. Run!"

Silk fired his last two bullets into the darkness. The guards wouldn't charge immediately. They would wait until they were sure Silk was at their mercy. By then Carol would have reached the car and escaped with the all-important message.

He waited five minutes. Then he arose, stretched his hands high and watched five men approach him cautiously. Two of them made a lunge for him. Silk went down under the impact, but he didn't try to fight. There was an odd kind of peace in his heart, for nothing they could do mattered now.

One of the men punched him brutally in the face. Holding his arms, they forced him back to the drill grounds. The word must have passed around quickly, for every man in the camp was already assembled there.

"We caught him just in time," one of Silk's captors reported, to a tall, stern-faced man. "A moment before, he had come over the fence. It was good that he did not come sooner, eh?"

"It makes little difference," the camp commander growled. "We should not permit him to leave, anyway, but I have no time for him right now. Lock him in one of the barracks and maintain a strong guard. Double the patrols at once and shoot to kill if anyone else appears."

Silk was dragged to one of the smaller barracks and thrown inside. When the door slammed shut, Silk grabbed a table and pulled himself erect. He wiped the blood off his face, found a chair and sat down wearily. It might be the end of the game for him. But once the Black Bat had the information which Carol carried in her alert brain, he'd know what to do.

Ten minutes passed, and then Silk heard the sounds of a commotion outside. Within a few moments, the door of his temporary prison opened.

Carol was shoved inside! As the light suddenly went on in the barracks Silk saw that her clothes were soiled. There were scratches on her face and an unholy determination in her eyes. Silk sprang half out of his chair, but he sank back defeatedly.

One of the men who had shoved Carol inside saw Silk and gave a yelp of recognition. He had been part of the band that had previously tried to use Silk as a human target.

"It is the man whom the Black Bat saved! These are the Black Bat's spies. Guard them carefully. Pass the word about that the Black Bat may be nearby."

Carol sat down beside Silk.

"I'm sorry," she said in a low voice. "There were more of them coming to the camp. They spotted me and—here I am. What are we going to do? How can we get the message through?"

"Quiet!" Silk whispered. "They don't know yet that I overheard the orders. They think I had just come over the fence when they grabbed me. We've got only one chance, even though it may mean our lives. I hate to think about it. It's after the deadline now. The Black Bat will know we're in trouble and he'll ride through hell to get us free. But what if he fails?

"This damned pack of lunatics will hit hard in every part of the country tomorrow night. They'll have the advantage of surprise. While I think they won't make any headway, there will be lives lost; factories and shipyards will be blown up. It will put back the rearmament program at least six months, and that might be fatal."

CAROL dragged her chair close to Silk's.

"The Black Bat hasn't failed us yet, Silk. You know how he works. These strutting, saluting maniacs won't think fast enough for him. You'll see."

Silk got up and shuffled unhappily around the prison. At each window a guard was posted. Two more stood at the single door. Escape was impossible. But Silk happened to glance across the parade grounds, attracted by a sudden confusion. Two uniformed men were dragging someone from the direction of the main gate. Silk pressed his face against the glass. Abruptly, his world blew up into fragments.

The man who was trying to wriggle out of the clutches of his captors wore a black, ribbed cape and a black hood over his face. The Black Bat had fallen into a trap!

CHAPTER XIX

Trick Against Trick

QUICKLY BUTCH drove the Black Bat back to Tony Quinn's house. He parked the car, and they walked briskly toward the garden gate. Before they reached it, the Black Bat seized his arm and held him back. Signaling for Butch to remain quiet, he crept forward until he could look around the gate.

As his eyes swept through the darkness, he made out three shadowy figures that were furtively approaching the windows of the living room. Careful as they had been, the Black Bat's acute hearing had detected the sound of their feet on the grass.

"I was afraid this might happen," he returned and whispered to Butch. "They suspect I'm the Black Bat, and those men are here to do a neat job of murder. We've got to get them, Butch. I'll slip down the tunnel and sneak into the house. The rest is up to you. Just be sure that not one of those men escapes."

Butch's face was grim as his big hands curled into lethal trip-hammer fists.

The Black Bat slipped through the gate, reached the garden house without being seen. Two minutes later, he was in the laboratory, hurriedly removing all traces of the Black Bat's identity. He thrust an automatic into the pocket of his smoking jacket and opened the hidden door. Stepping into the study, he walked directly to his accustomed chair in front of the fireplace.

He didn't turn on the lights.

The trio of killers was still prowling, looking through windows. Soon they'd reach the study.

Tony Quinn reached for a newspaper, slid the gun between its folds and kept his finger on the trigger. He kept the newspaper on his lap. Just then, he heard stealthy sounds outside the study window, saw a face rise up and glance quickly inside. Quinn's finger grew tense on the trigger. He'd give Butch every chance to do all the work, but if he saw a gun turned his way, he'd shoot.

Suddenly, Quinn saw a man's whole form flash by the window. The sound of a fist crashing against bone reached his ears. He leaped up and hurried to the window. Outside, neatly arranged in a row, lay three unconscious men. Butch stood over them, nursing his right fist and grinning broadly. Quinn opened the window.

"Butch, pile all three of them into the coupé. I know it will be crowded, but never mind how you stack them. Drive somewhere and dump them. Then hurry back. It's after the time I allotted Silk and Carol. They may be in trouble."

"You gonna turn 'em loose, Boss?" Butch blurted. "They'll keep on thinking you're the Black Bat, won't they? Maybe I oughta wring their necks a little, huh?"

"No. Follow my orders. We're not murderers, Butch. These poor fools know nothing. The leader of the spy ring gives his orders, and they are carried out by men who have no idea what they're doing. Anyway, as soon as they wake up, they'll run for it as far as they can travel. Get going, and step on it!"

Quinn sat down again, forcing himself to be patient until Butch would return. Carol and Silk were thirty minutes overtime. Were they trapped—or dead? He had a violent urge to take the sleek sedan in his garage, cast aside all pretense of not being the Black Bat, and go after them. But he resolutely put this wild idea aside. To keep it from tormenting him, he made his mind review the case, considering each suspected person.

TOLLY, the lawyer whose clientele consisted mostly of people of the same nationality as the spy ring. He had saved Quinn's life when von Elkin tried to run him down. Von Elkin might know the solution to everything, but blind Tony Quinn couldn't testify that he had seen von Elkin driving the murder car.

Then there was Roscoe Bell, who so far had hardly entered into the case at all. But his background made him seem the logical one to run the spy system. He had lost a fortune when war conditions ruined his export business. He had practically worked for the regimes now interested in disrupting the United States as much as possible. Bell looked powerful enough to have been the man who had tackled the Black Bat in the darkened room. He might have lied about being on his way home rather than leaving, when Butch seized him. He looked powerful enough to be that man.

Major Rankin also seemed to require considerable thought. It was more than possible that he had absorbed Nazi ideology, returned to the United States and become one of their spies. Treason like that had often happened all over the world recently. Quinn knew that military secrets had found their way into the hands of the spy ring—secrets which only someone close to the Army and Navy could obtain.

Yet far back in his mind lay clues which almost sewed up the right man in a net from which he could never extricate himself. Quinn hesitated to use those clues, however. The arrest of the spy leader now would serve only to fan high the smoldering fire in the hearts of his followers. The only way to stop this fiendish attack was to gather in the whole spy ring first. Every branch, every man prepared to attack, must be captured!

There had never been any doubt in Quinn's mind that the perforated cards were the key to the entire puzzle. How they fitted it had been the only problem, but in the past few hours he had found several important hints.

From his desk in the study, he took a stack of ordinary road maps and brought them to the laboratory. Laying them on the bench, he picked up one of the punched cards. He placed it in the upper left-hand corner of the map, traced its outline and repeated the process until the whole map had been marked off.

For a long moment, he pondered his next step, switching his eyes anxiously from the cards to the map. When he flipped through the cards, turning them on their reverse sides, he suddenly drew in his breath. The faint gray numbers of one corresponded to the number of the highway map!

He had suspected that before. Now he merely had to find out which part of the map the card fitted, and that was only a matter of patient experimentation. Starting at the upper left-hand corner, he slid the card along. He discarded each section until the tiny holes suddenly blended with a number of highways and intersections....

Quinn's first impulse was to shout with triumph. But that would only waste valuable time, and he hadn't really solved the complete riddle.

After marking the highways and intersections with a pencil, he stared at the cards and maps, trying to figure out the significance of the whole puzzle. What did it mean? He had an important clue, but did the rest of the cards substantiate it?

Taking a deep, hopeful breath, Quinn searched through the perforated cards for the first two he had found. Then he checked through his stack of road maps until he came across one that corresponded with the number written in secret ink on the back of a card.

"If this works," he whispered anxiously, "I've got the key! If it doesn't...."

He marked off the map in rectangles and, by sliding the card along experimentally, found the proper section. Each perforation marked a road or corner!

QUINN WAS still rushing through his job when Butch came through the tunnel. The huge bruiser was grinning with glee.

"I did like you said, Boss. I threw them over the edge of the city dump. Just for luck, I plastered each guy a couple more times. What's next?"

Quinn donned his black outfit, stuffed his guns in place and hurried out with Butch to the coupé.

"We're going to that camp you found," he explained. "Silk and Carol must be in trouble. This time we'll be invading enemy territory, Butch. It will be dangerous, but no matter what happens, Carol and Silk have to be saved."

Butch drove savagely at a terrific pace through the night. As they slowed at an intersection, the Black Bat's eyes flitted over a group of billboards. He singled out the most interesting. Sponsored by the Officers' Club, it implored the public to rescue American natives who were in danger abroad. The Black Bat nodded thoughtfully.

When Butch found the lane, the Black Bat pierced the darkness, and soon discovered Carol's car hidden in the brush. Now he was sure they had been captured. Stealthily, he led Butch toward the camp. There seemed to be no guards posted outside the high fence.

"You can't see them, but there are fifty or more uniformed men in that camp," he told Butch. "There are too many shacks to search quickly.

Carol and Silk must be in one of them, but which one? Butch, are you willing to risk your life in this cause? Would you put on my cape and hood, deliberately let yourself be captured and thrown into the same hut with Silk and Carol?"

"Anythin' you say, Boss. But is it okay to slug a few of them mugs before they grab me?"

"Slug away. Here, put on the hood and cape. Stay right where you are until I go back to the coupé and get a duplicate outfit. Butch, I know you've got what it takes. We'll pull through because we have to."

Later, Butch crept toward the main gate. He knew that the hood and cape made him a marked man. The foe might open fire the instant he came into view, yet Butch kept on going. When he saw two men standing just inside the gate, he picked up a stone and hurled it. Then everything happened swiftly, noiselessly, like an old silent picture. Without a sound, one guard sprang into the tiny shack beside the gate. Almost instantly a dozen men with rifles raced out of the woods.

They rushed through the gates, which had suddenly flown open. In his hiding place, Butch held his breath. Two men came closer, beating the underbrush. He waited until they had almost found him. With silent viciousness, he leaped up, grabbed their necks, banged their heads together violently. They collapsed to the ground.

Grinning behind his black hood, he wheeled to face six other men. The only sound was the crack of bones as his fist pulped one man's face. Even when he raised both hands and surrendered, nobody jeered or shouted triumphantly. Capturing the Black Bat was too awe-inspiring a feat for such ordinary emotions....

CHAPTER XX

Death by the Rope

UNDER COVER of carefully chosen shadows, the Black Bat was close to the gates when the men charged out to surround Butch. As he hoped, no one remained to watch the gate. Unobserved, he ran through, dived into tall grass just in time, for men were racing from camp to aid the guards.

Still in his hood and cape, Butch was hustled to the drill grounds. The tall camp commander emerged from a barracks with an impatient scowl on his face. He swaggered up to the captive.

"So this is the Black Bat," he sneered, awed despite his attempted sarcasm. "The man police and thieves could never capture. It proves, my followers, that we are much cleverer than the law or even organized crime in this country. Now we shall see who this Black Bat is. Then we shall take care of him and his two comrades."

The hood was wrenched off Butch's face. Then Butch was dragged toward the barracks where Silk and Carol were held.

The Black Bat saw all this with considerable satisfaction. He had hated to risk endangering Butch, but they were almost bound to imprison him with the other two.

The Black Bat ran lightly through the thick woods. Because he could see everything in his path, he made no noise. When he reached the back of the barracks, he spotted the guards beside the windows. Smiling grimly, he dropped to all fours and crawled closer. Then, with inverted gun, he suddenly plunged.

The guard at the rear of the barracks didn't hear nor see him coming. The gun crashed down, muffled by the military cap of the guard.

The Black Bat scratched on the window. Silk sprang to it, opened it quietly.

"They strike at nine-thirty tomorrow night," Silk whispered. "In case we all don't get clear, there are almost a hundred men here. They've got a whole secret arsenal ready."

"Where is it?" the Black Bat asked.

"In a small shed near the drill grounds. I saw them bringing guns out of it."

"Be ready. When that ammunition dump lets go, the whole camp will be in a panic. Scramble through this window and head for the gate. Is Carol all right?"

He saw her smiling confidently at him. The Black Bat waved, then faded away into the darkness.

He found the arsenal easily, for it was the only building that didn't look like a barracks. One man was posted at the door. The Black Bat crept forward, gun ready. All the other Bund members were gathered in small groups on the parade grounds, rehearsing verbally what they'd do when the time came to strike. He had to cross a cleared space before he could reach the arsenal. That entailed considerable danger, but he didn't hesitate.

AS HE approached, the guard shouted an alarm and started to raise his rifle. The Black Bat fired once and the man went down in a heap.

Like a flash, the Black Bat leaped through the door. He saw boxes of ammunition, a heap of grenades and sub-machine guns loaded and ready for action.

He seized one as the uniformed spies closed in ominously on the building. He grinned expectantly. They outnumbered him, but they had given him the whip hand....

His automatic rifle suddenly blasted, spitting flame and lead. Nobody could battle that stuttering death. Even the verbally fearless spies had to break ranks and flee. He could have shot them down, to the last man, but that would have meant shooting them in the back. He held his fire.

Swiftly, he grabbed a hand grenade, yanked the pin, dropped it. He raced out, timing every action then to the split-second. Everything had to move on a time-table.

Carol, Silk and Butch were sprinting toward the gate—straight into the muzzles of guards they couldn't see! But the Black Bat saw the rifles aimed. He squeezed the trigger of his machine gun, chopped inevitable death at the guards. As they went down, the men who had fled came charging back, revolvers roaring. He whirled on them, trapped.

Like a clap of thunder, the ammunition dump went up. The terrific concussion hurled the Black Bat to the ground, but he was up before the camp members knew what had happened.

The Black Bat and his aides ran madly down the lane. They piled into Carol's car—all but Butch, who took the wheel of the coupé. In another moment they were streaking back to the city.

"Carol!" the Black Bat ordered crisply. "Stop here. We don't have much time, but there's something I must investigate."

Carol stopped abruptly. The Black Bat knew the danger of delay, yet this was vital enough to risk capture. He hurried toward a billboard at one side of the road, stepped behind it. What he read in the dark on the reverse of the sign made him whistle in grudging admiration. He returned quickly to the car, signaled Carol to start instantly.

"What an idea!" he said. "But nothing really surprises me, after that last hour at the camp. Carol, I can't let you take chances like that! I swear I'll stop sending you into danger."

"Of course you will, darling," Carol laughed, "when there is no more Black Bat. Are we finished for the night?"

"We're finished," the Black Bat said. "So is the case—except for one more important detail. Butch is right behind us. Signal him to come abreast. I'm taking the coupé. You three go back and get some rest. No questions now. I can see them ready to burst from your lips. Tomorrow afternoon, Silk, I'll have a little job for you. But keep some coffee ready when I get back, will you?"

"Yes, sir," Silk answered. "Don't forget, though, the deadline is nine-thirty. Those cards have been sent out already. Every spy in the country has one by now. And, say—I had a look at one of the big shots of the ring. He was a heavy-set man, with practically no neck at all. Blonde, too, and about five feet eight."

"The Honorable Mr. Bell," the Black Bat mused. "It's a perfect description of him. He's the man who slugged Butch. I'll soon have a little talk with him."

The Black Bat changed cars when Butch stopped. He streaked ahead of Carol's sedan, driving straight toward Bell's home.

WITHOUT arousing any attention, the Black Bat entered Bell's house. He hadn't long to work, for with daylight, the Black Bat must fold his wings. Stepping lightly through the kitchen, he suddenly froze into immobility. The front door had suddenly banged shut! Gun in hand, the Black Bat advanced cautiously. There was no one in the hallway. He headed for the library. As he reached it, he holstered his gun and sprinted inside.

A man was hanging from an old-fashioned electric light fixture. An overturned chair lay beneath him. The whole situation spelled suicide, except for the banging of the front door which the Black Bat had heard.

He seized the waist of the victim, quickly loosened the noose and finally extricated the man's neck from it. Carrying the limp form to a sofa, he laid it down gently and made a quick examination.

The victim was Roscoe Bell—the man who had visited the Bund camp only a short time before and issued the final orders for the assault against American civilization! He wasn't dead, for the Black Bat had cut him down before he choked completely. Yet Bell responded to none of the Black Bat's efforts to awaken him.

"Drugged," the Black Bat muttered. "He deserved this, but I wonder if the spy leader wasn't a bit too soon."

He carried Bell out of the house and put him in the coupé. There was a visitor in Tony Quinn's home that night—a visitor who lay unconscious until midday, when a black hood was drawn over his head. He could breathe easily, yet not have the slightest idea where he was nor who nursed him to normal.

BEFORE nine-fifteen the next night, twelve men slipped down an alley and into a side door which led them to a dimly lighted room. A stage occupied one end of the room. A radio stood against one wall and incongruously played soft dance music. The men entered singly, and about ten minutes apart, so it required two full hours before they were all assembled.

Their faces bore expressions that varied from strain to worry. They wore no uniforms and gave no salutes. Instead they talked in low voices, as if they were afraid some unseen presence might overhear.

"Do you think it will go all right?" one asked. "It will be hard for us if it fails."

"Bah, how can it fail?" another replied. "Tonight is the turning point for us. Tonight we hear how our men can fight and kill. We see, for the first time, the face of our Director—the man who has planned all this."

"But at the camp last night," the first man said uncertainly, "the Black Bat was there. A hundred of our men could not hold him, nor even shoot him down. He is free and I do not like it. What if he comes here?"

"How can he? Who knows of this place with the exception of ourselves and our Director? It is agreed that the Black Bat heard nothing of our plans, nor did those people whom he apparently rescued. He does not know when we strike any more than this silly Government does. Look, it is nine twenty-five! In five minutes, that foolish dance music will stop and something else will come over the air. Music to our ears, eh? But not sweet notes for the others who live in this country.

"It will be over by midnight. We shall hold many of the most important and strategic points. Other men will rally to our banner. There are two million of us in this country—two million who owe allegiance to the Fatherland, whether they believe so or not! Some will join, and the others will feel our vengeance. We cannot be beaten."

As the hands of the clock over the radio reached the half-hour, the men drew into one rank. They stood at rigid attention, all gazing expectantly at the small stage.

The already dim lights in the room winked out. Half a second later, the blinding lights on the stage were turned on. The men closed their eyes, made no other movement. Then they heard the voice of the man they called their Director.

"You are all here. Good! In a few moments we shall know the results of our long, careful planning. How can we fail? The radio will carry full reports. When I am assured that victory is ours, I shall come down off this stage and you will know me. You will have a good laugh, too—at the discomfiture certain important officials are going to feel when they realize how they were tricked. Meanwhile, stand at ease. Any moment now it will start."

FIVE minutes passed by. Then the dance music was abruptly cut off and the voice of an announcer, vibrant with excitement, broke in.

"We interrupt this program to bring you startling news. Five minutes ago, one of the most important bridges on the West Coast was blown up. A Navy yard in the same region was turned into junk by bombs. Other reports are constantly coming in. It is our duty to remain calm, though it appears that a Trojan Horse organization has struck at us.

"All transportation in New York City has ceased, due to explosions. A submarine base in New England has been bombed. All through the Middle West, the South—everywhere—there are riots. Men in uniforms, equipped with machine guns and hand grenades, are creating a panic wherever they strike. Stand by! There are orders from the nation's Capital coming through."

The leader's voice gloated over the glaring footlights.

"You see? Some have doubted me. They are the same type who doubted the man we worship, but he fought his way through, and he is now the undisputed leader of the entire world. One of the last strongholds of the weak plutocratic democracies is on the verge of breaking down. These people have wasted too much mercy for their fellow men. The world is well rid of that kind. From this moment on, only the strong will survive, to the greater glory of the man who has urged us on. Listen, does that news not sound pleasant?"

"Military law has been ordered in more than a hundred communities," the announcer cried. "In some places, authority has passed out of the hands of the police and into those of the Trojan Horse killers. The enemy is machine-gunning ruthlessly. Men, women and children have died by the hundreds. Armories have been blown to bits, and with them the equipment needed by the National Guard. The war has crossed the Atlantic so swiftly that none of us is prepared.

"Police insist that no one leave home under any circumstances. If the enemy troops—whether they are parachute men or not, we do not yet know—come into sight, phone the police at once. Do not try to intercept them."

The announcer kept stating incidents that grew more gruesome by the moment. Finally, the leader spoke softly.

"It is time. We have won without question. What happens after this achievement will be unimportant. Therefore you will turn the radio down. Gentlemen, you will now meet your leader!"

The overhead lights were turned on and the footlights began to dim. This man, whom they knew only as the Director, liked theatrical effects, for they lent more glamor. The dozen subleaders stood at rigid attention but with gaping mouths. Even the news that still came through the radio was minor. They were about to meet the mysterious figure who had led them to victory.

The footlights grew dimmer and dimmer. Suddenly, they were extinguished entirely. The leader moved forward a few steps and he was smiling broadly.

"I have purposely spoken to you in a disguised voice," he explained, "but secrecy is no longer necessary."

The man who faced his audience was Philip Trent! He was the man who headed the Officers' Club and campaigned for funds with which to fight the very organization he directed. Trent's smiling face creased into an angry frown.

"Well," he asked roughly, "why doesn't someone speak? Is your amazement too much? Have you lost your tongues? Come, many of you know me. Can't you see how I have tricked these pigs?"

"Be careful whom you call a pig!"

The voice spoke softly, close to his ear. Trent's face turned pale, making the scarred cheek grow a beet-red. He felt a gun digging into the small of his back as he raised his head and gaped at the windows of the cellar meeting room. Constructed of steel, they were now open. Through each protruded the ugly snout of a machine gun. Trent turned his head slowly, saw a hooded and caped figure standing behind him.

"The Black Bat!" he shrieked.

CHAPTER XXI

End of a Spy

HASTILY other people walked up on the stage—Commissioner Warner, the Chief Inspector of Police, and men from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Trent glared at them with hate-filled eyes.

"So I have been tricked! Somehow you found this place, but you are too late. I cannot be executed without a trial. Before you can even put me in jail, my men will be here. They have taken over the most important sections of the country. I shall give orders that unless I am released, one thousand civilians will be shot down. No, five thousand—for I am worth that many of your stupid kind. As in everything else, a democracy has acted too late."

"Turn up that radio," the Black Bat ordered crisply. When a G-man obeyed, the radio started playing dance music. At the end of the number, an announcer merely stated the next song on the program. There was certainly no hysteria in his voice. Then the music was cut off again just as it had been before. The same excited announcer rapped out further bulletins.

"The whole country is in the hands of the enemy. Our Army has been smashed. The Navy is thousands of miles away, on fake orders. Officials are even now negotiating terms of peace...."

"Do you see?" Trent sneered. "Now do I go free, or is it your desire to commit suicide? The first stipulation of peace will be your deaths unless I am freed."

"Just keep listening," the Black Bat retorted.

"We're licked!" the radio voice continued. "The White House has just been destroyed." Then the voice changed suddenly, accompanied by a laugh. "How am I doing, boys? Was that realistic, or wasn't it?"

Trent's grin turned to a stare of fear. His men actually cringed.

"The broadcast was faked," the Black Bat explained. "We tapped your wire hours ago and hooked it to a microphone. An accomplished radio announcer brought you the news you wanted to hear, but your whole scheme has collapsed, Trent. Those little perforated cards you sent to help your aides have helped us more. You were much too sure of yourself. The way you requested donations for use in running down spies was a masterpiece of conceit, for you intended to use that money in financing the spy ring.

"You even had billboard posters put up all over the country, but these had a more significant purpose. On the backs of certain sections of the posters were printed maps and full directions for your men. With the aid of these, they could find arms, refuge and sympathizers to lend a hand. The perforated cards were simply placed over the proper maps and each perforation revealed the location of a signboard bearing that ad. Your men had only to visit the billboards.

"But when they did, they ran into police and G-men, who were planted there! Your years of intrigue were useless, Trent. Every person you involved in this scheme has been exposed and arrested. It was clever—we all admit that. Your men knew nothing. If they were picked up, they couldn't talk. Until the day and hour you set, they would remain in ignorance."

TRENT suddenly drew himself up. "All right, gentlemen," he replied suavely. "I only acted the part to see how good I was. Yes, I did head this band of spies, but only to nail them all. I planned to turn the entire group over to the authorities. However, there were some mysterious persons behind it and things got out of hand. At least, that's what I thought. Those broadcasts nearly frightened twenty years from my life."

"A good story," the Black Bat applauded. "But how do you account for the fact that four retired military officers told you—and you alone—certain military secrets, which soon passed into the hands of the powers you represent? You knew those officers would realize that no one but you could have transmitted that information, so you had them destroyed.

"At first I thought you were intent on killing off all capable officers to slow down the defense of this country. I believe your own men thought the same thing. But you failed to kill Colonel Catlin after he informed you that authorities intended to raid certain spy nests. You notified those spies and as a result the raids were fruitless.

"But you didn't know that Catlin had been called back and was an active member of Military Intelligence. He received a wire which informed him that the spies had been tipped off.

"He suspected you, and was going to expose you before the meeting you had called. You beat him to it, but fortunately I found enough of that wire to get a copy."

Trent spread his hands in wild appeal.

"Have you forgotten that I served in the A.E.F., that I was badly wounded? Look at my face, my hair! Do you think I'd turn to the people who almost killed me? Certainly I deserve some benefit of the doubt."

"You got it," the Black Bat said. "I suspected you, but I couldn't make myself believe a man of your standing and history could possibly have turned spy. However, that doubt is gone now, because you are not even Philip Trent. You are the Baron Otto von Dahlke, one of the greatest spies of the First World War! Your fingerprints prove it. You were on the verge of being captured just before the Armistice, but you managed to escape. You fled toward the German lines, where you were wounded by your own side.

"You were taken to a German hospital, and there a colossal plan was concocted to get you to the United States as Philip Trent, who had really been killed. You took his identification, pretended a minor case of amnesia and shell-shock for a while. You were sent back to this country. Just before you arrived, Philip Trent's sister was mysteriously killed—by your agents—because she alone could have known you were not Philip Trent.

"A man named Roscoe Bell sponsored you. You moved away from the midwestern city where Trent had lived, and came to this city. Bell set you up in business because he was promised a great deal of export business in return. You kept Trent's diaries well hidden in your home, so that if anything happened which demanded that you recall Trent's past, you had his history for reference."

A pair of G-men brought Roscoe Bell into the room. White-faced, he pointed at Trent.

"Everything the Black Bat said is the truth. I'll swear to it. Von Dahlke came here and established himself as Philip Trent. Later, when another power ruled his Fatherland, he was appointed head of all secret agent activities in the United States. He became a disciple of the new Fatherland. I was in it up to my neck, so they made me hide von Elkin, threatening to kill me if I refused. But now that I'm free of them, I'll talk, all right.

"I heard that broadcast. If van Dahlke's plans had gone through, that's exactly what would have happened. I'm a poor specimen of an American right now, but believe me, I'll do what I can to make up for it!"

"SO you see," the Black Bat went on, "a net has closed around you, Trent, alias von Dahlke. You'll be charged with murder first—the murder of Anton Morino. He never wanted to work for your spy ring, but you forced him by threatening to kill his relatives in Austria. But Morino reached a certain point and couldn't go any further. He even refused to trust me, and crashed through a window to escape. Then he made a fatal mistake.

"Knowing that Philip Trent was fighting spies tooth and nail, he went to you. He was afraid to tell the police because he had been involved.

You must have asked him to help trap von Elkin, but in reality Morino trapped himself. You were afraid to take any chances that he may have talked to someone else, so you tipped off the G-men to raid von Elkin's travel agency. You killed Morino there.

"I can prove that Morino saw you just before the murder. Commissioner Warner met you only a block away from the building, but I didn't know that. There are apartment houses on either side of your home, too. They have doormen, and those people are incredibly good at remembering faces. They even recall that the murdered officers came to see you often.

"You started the Officers' Club so you'd be in constant contact with men who knew what was going on. Some of them may even have known the real Philip Trent. But the wounds you suffered provided a good alibi for your changed appearance and the fact that you might not remember everything.

"You had the stage set at the meeting so your spies could escape easily. You ordered all the men out front to listen to your speech so the spies could get out by a rear exit unobserved. You sent von Elkin to take your place at a meeting night before last, but von Elkin didn't understand the significance. That night, you were to make a radio broadcast appeal for funds. You did make a recording which was to be short-waved to the meeting while von Elkin appeared as a dummy."

Trent closed his eyes and drew a long breath.

"Very well," he said stiffly. "I cannot deny proof of that kind. But there is one thing I will tell. The Black Bat ruined my plans, and so I shall expose the Black Bat. He is Tony Quinn! Yes, Tony Quinn—the blind man!"

The hooded figure behind Trent jabbed him with the gun.

"Turn your head, von Dahlke. Look toward the door. Detective-captain McGrath happens to be standing there—with Tony Quinn! I did not wish a blind man to be suspected of performing in my role. I knew you suspected him, and I took steps to prove he could not possibly be the Black Bat."

Trent stared at Tony Quinn, who stood beside McGrath. Quinn's eyes stared ahead blankly, apparently seeing nothing.

"Which settles that," the Black Bat said. "Now I think the entire performance is over. I admire your cleverness, von Dahlke. Any man who can pose as another over a period of years is no fool. I suspected everyone but you at first. Attorney Tolly, because he had so many close connections with your kind. But Tolly was only trying to help bring stranded relatives to this country.

"Major Rankin, too, acted oddly. He didn't even report his kidnapping except to his direct superiors, because he detested any form of publicity. He got away from your men in the confusion I started. I should have—"

Von Dahlke suddenly spun around, shot a straight-arm jab at the Black Bat's chin. He streaked toward the door. For an instant he was in a cleared space—until the machine guns at the windows ripped stuttering blasts of death. Von Dahlke hesitated. Staring blindly, he drew erect for a second, and then plunged forward on his face.

TONY QUINN was driven home in McGrath's car. Silk was at the door to let him in.

"Say, I guess I must have been all wrong about you, Quinn," McGrath said contritely. "I'm sorry."

But after McGrath drove away, Silk let out a quiet, victorious laugh.

"I think I did it rather well, sir, but it was nothing like the way you could have handled it. That spy wouldn't have made a break if you were in the hood and cape I wore."

"It's just as well," Quinn said. "Men of his kind are safer dead. You know, I thought it was Trent right after he and Warner were helping me cross the street and that murder car came roaring down on us. Trent didn't make the slightest attempt to push me out of the way. He actually kept such a hard grip on my arm that Warner couldn't get me out of the car's path. I couldn't tell them that, of course, without exposing myself as the Black Bat.

"So, Silk, this calls for a celebration. Carol and Butch will arrive soon. We've defeated a group of men intent on destroying our country. I hope it will arouse our people to the full realization of what a Trojan Horse in our midst is capable of doing. We need to be toughened. We've got to become stronger, harder than those gangsters abroad. I know, from this case, that they must be fought as they fight themselves—without mercy, with absolute relentlessness."

"I think," Silk replied softly, "that with you to fight for us, the Nazi menace will not make another Norway, Holland, Belgium or France, of America...."

THE END

THE BELFRY by Will Murray

The Black Bat takes on two traditional but entirely different pulp menaces in this latest volume of his midnight exploits.

Written in June 1940 and submitted under the working title of "The Trojan Horse," this ninth novel in the long-running series was printed in the November 1940 issue of *Black Book Detective. The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse* is another Fifth Column story of the type that series creator Norman A. Daniels specialized in. But here, instead of the typical shadowy agents of a faraway but unnamed foreign nation, the Nazi plotters are delineated without the veneer of such sops to American readers who supported Hitler, while on the cover German-American Bund agents sport unmistakable swastikas.

The reason for the shift to unvarnished reality was the worsening war situation in Europe. Over the spring of 1940, Nazi Germany invaded, in succession, Denmark, Norway, France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. France fell in May. The Battle of Britain commenced that summer. There was no longer any question that the spreading conflict would eventually engulf the world. Any pretense, once the bombing of Great Britain began, that the Axis powers weren't a threat to global stability was annihilated by daily newspaper headlines. U.S. neutrality was over. The only question remaining was whether we would enter what was then a purely European conflict.

Daniels' premise—panicking the United States into entering World War II with an army of green conscripts—is something only a pulp editor or writer would dream up. Talk of reinstating the Draft raged all spring and summer, and finally American men were required to register with the Selective Service System in September 1940. In reality, Germany feared a U.S. entry into the war, the readiness of its army notwithstanding. Ultimately, it took Japanese aggression to pull America into the conflict.

These two issues mark the first cover appearances of artist Virgil Evans Pyles, who usually signed his work "V. E. Pyles." A Kentuckian who came to New York after serving in World War I, during the 1920s Pyles did interior illustrations for prestigious slick magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post.*

With the Great Depression, Pyles followed the shifting market to the pulp magazines and continued his interior work. Gradually, he began painting covers for such top-flight titles as Munsey's *Argosy* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*.

By 1940, Pyles had started doing the interior lustrations to the Black Bat novels, which he did in parallel to Munsey's Green Lama stories, which were simultaneously appearing in *Double Detective*.

Pyles painted Black Bat covers sporadically over the next couple of years. But these two issues are rare examples of the same artist doing the cover and the black-and-white illustrations for the lead novel.

Our second selection, *The Black Bat's Dragon Trail*, reads like a revised *Phantom Detective* novel. It may well have been. For there is a sequence where the masked and wanted Bat cooperates with the police in the same manner as the always-disguised but officially sanctioned Phantom. This is a tipoff that all is not as it should be.

The Black Bat's Dragon Trail belongs to the pulp thriller sub-genre sometimes called Oriental menace, and in an earlier day would have been consigned to the Yellow Peril category. Although dated now, this was a very common theme, thanks in large part to Sax Rohmer's Doctor Fu Manchu, who was still being published regularly in that period. His career bracketed the pulp era, beginning in 1913 and concluding with Rohmer's death in 1959.

It was a staple of *The Shadow*, *The Phantom Detective* and *The Spider* as well, not to mention countless other mystery pulp stories. This was the first time it was used in the Black Bat series. It may well have been the last.

Pitching ideas to Thrilling group editor Mort Weisinger for Dan Fowler stories in *G-Man* magazine, writer Manly Wade Wellman once suggested a Fu Manchu-style villain be introduced.Weisinger reportedly replied exasperatedly, "No, no, a thousand times, no!" It was already old stuff by then. By this point in the Black Bat's career, Weisinger had moved on, ironically to edit Batman comics for DC.

The author of this novel is not known, but strongly suspected. The writing is very different from Norman Daniels' workmanlike prose, and the subordinate villains get much more of a spotlight than most pulp authors gave them.

As with an earlier installment, *The Black Bat's Flame Trail*, this author gets the name of one of the Black Bat's inner circle wrong. Once more Norton "Silk" Kirby becomes "Silk" Norton. Unless this mystery pulpster was given that earlier issue and copied an unknown ghost contributor's error, this present novel is the work of the same writer who did *The Black Bat's Flame Trail*.

Norvell W. Page of *Spider* fame is the most probable suspect here. He will definitely go on to do one more Black Bat novel.

There is an interesting thug in this story named Flash Mega. Not long after *The Black Bat's Dragon Trail* appeared in print, a Shadow novel by Theodore Tinsley was written, featuring a similar gangster named Flash Rego.

This Bat adventure does not appear to be Tinsley's work. He was not known to have contributed to the Black Bat series. So how to explain this coincidence?

First, Page and Tinsley were close friends. They socialized, and supported one another in their pulp careers. In fact, when the United States entered World War II, both Page and Tinsley bailed out on the dwindling pulp-fiction market, relocated to Washington, DC, joining the fledgling Office of War Information for the duration.

They did not co-author any stories, however. But let's let Ted Tinsley speak for himself:

> "No, I never wrote a line of copy for Norvell Page. We plotted lots of Spiders and Shadows together but we kept our writing separate. I found it a lot easier to help Page with Spider plotting because I didn't have to write or explain it and he felt the same way about helping me with The Shadow since he had nothing to do with the writing of it."

So it's likely that Page and Tinsley kicked around the plot for this particular Black Bat story until one of them coined a name later reworked for The Shadow. It's probably nothing more remarkable than that. But it is further evidence that Norvell Page was likely the author of the Black Bat entry.

A third pulpster, Prentice Winchell, aka "Stewart Sterling," cannot be discounted here. The *Black Mask* writer was also close friends with Page and Tinsley, and years later penned the final Black Bat story, "Hot, Willing—and Deadly."

The Black Bat's Dragon Trail appeared in the January 1941 issue of *Black Book Detective*, while the Tinsley Shadow novel, *The Crimson Death*, ran in the August 1, 1941 issue of *The Shadow* magazine. It was written in February, so the Black Bat novel was penned first, sometime in the summer of 1940, probably around July, when Norman Daniels was busy kicking off the Masked Detective series under the house name of "C.K.M. Scanlon."

In two or three issues hence, we will print what we believe to be the third and final Norvell Page Black Bat novel, *The Black Bat's Summons*. Stylistically, it is definitely the work of Page. But as with most of the Thrilling pulp novels, an in-house editor often revised the stories to homogenize the prose style, so it's not purely Page's work.

But *The Black Bat's Dragon Trail* is an exciting change of pace—even if this month's "G. Wayman Jones" inexplicably swapped the Bat's usual .45 caliber automatics for a brace of .38s. •

THE BLACK BAT'S

A Complete Book-Length Novel

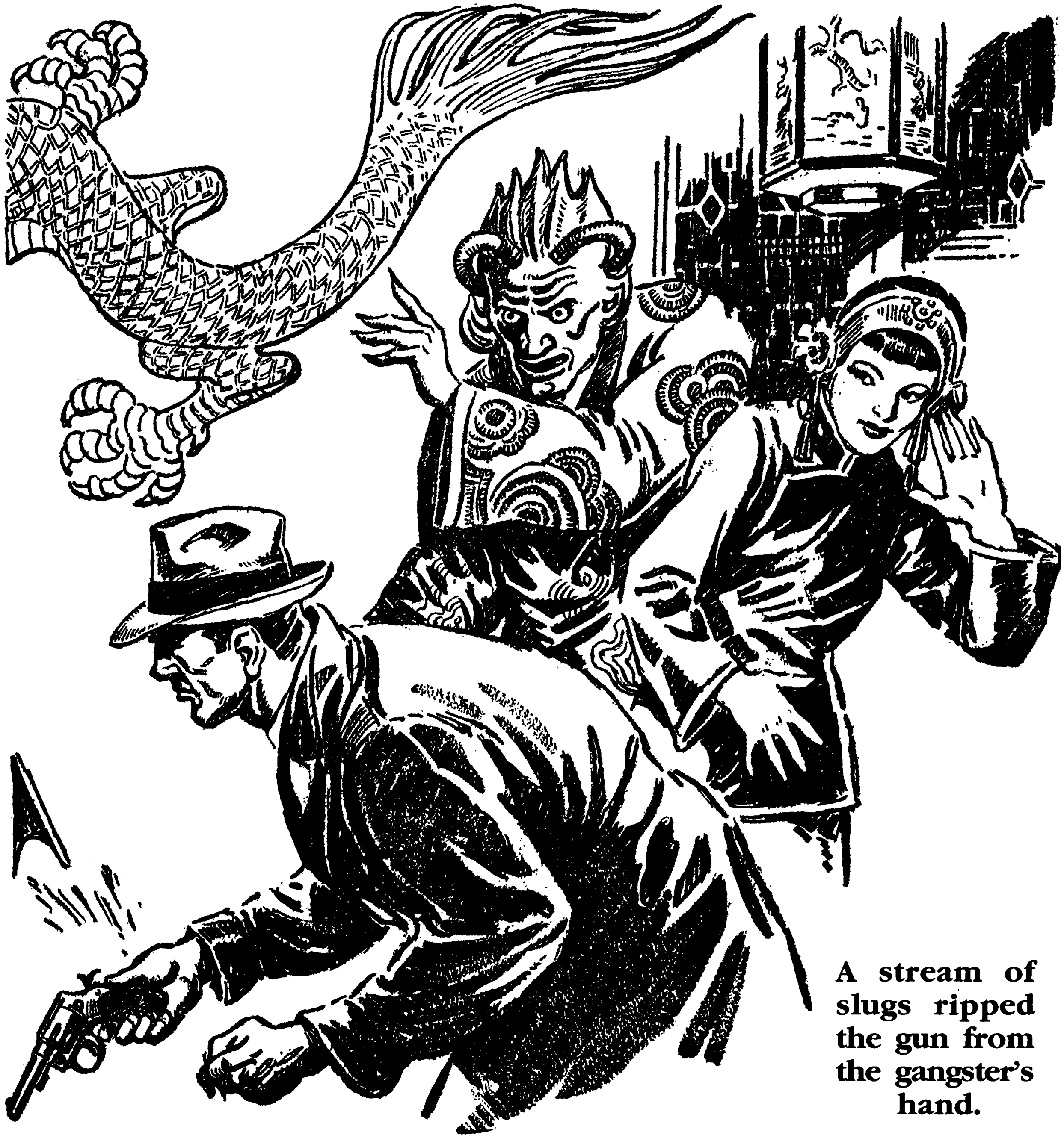
CHAPTER I

The Dragon Strike

IT had been raining lightly. Down in Chinatown the wet pavement and cobblestones reflected the lights from a thousand windows and Neon signs. It shimmered upon elderly Chinese, with hands tucked in their sleeves in patriarchial dignity, shuffling along with a younger generation in American clothes. It gleamed upon dozens of others threading

Tony Quinn Plays the Role of Hooded

DRAGON TRAIL



A stream of slugs ripped the gun from the gangster's hand.

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse," "The Black Bat's Triumph," etc.

their way in and out of the cafés to blend with the restless human tide—opulent folk in search of food and exotic entertainment, panhandlers from the slums in search of handouts, and sharp-eyed, swarthy-faced men with upturned raincoat collars, hat brims pulled low over their eyes.

At the narrow entrance to a dim alley one of the raincoated figures, moving casually as he approached, paused to light a cigarette. It gave him a chance to sweep his gaze up the street in both

Avenger to Foil a Murder Master's Plans!

directions over his cupped hands and to look at the diamond-studded wristwatch within inches of his eyes. There was a large diamond stickpin in his tie while still another stone glittered on a finger of his left hand.

"Eleven-thirty," the man muttered under his breath. "The others oughta be showin' up any time now if they ain't already here. Yep—here comes one of 'em."

He turned and stepped swiftly into the alley, melting into night that was Stygian. The second man paused a moment to glance furtively about him, then he, too, disappeared as though whisked from sight by an invisible hand. There came a muffled curse as he stumbled over some refuse underfoot. The anathema was followed by a chuckle from somewhere up ahead.

Within ten minutes, several more men appeared in the alley. Presently several husky Chinese also approached and followed on the heels of the Americans. They made their way along the alley that was so narrow there hardly was room for the two big, sleek laundry trucks parked at the back of a ruined building that was windowless above. The white placards of a house wrecking company were pasted on the red bricks.

From the darkness a voice speaking in Cantonese from somewhere beside the trucks directed the Orientals to the front truck. The American mobsters who had gathered got into the second one. As the last man came in, a Chinese driver at the wheel of the rear truck stuck his head out and again whispered directions.

"If you will open the two back doors of the truck, Dragon," he said to one of the gangsters, "you will find your friends inside."

The man obeyed. He crawled in, fumbling around for a seat. From the darkness up near the front came a growled complaint.

"I don't like joinin' up with a secret Chinese society one damned bit. This is the first time the boss has sent us on a job and not told us what it is. I think he's nuts, if you ask me." He sniffed audibly. "Besides I like workin' with guys of my own kind."

THE bespectacled Chinese sitting at the wheel of the truck turned in the darkness. He spoke in English that was cultured, and without a trace of accent.

"The Chinese members of the Dragon feel the same way, Flash, except myself," he said. "But they realize that what we are about to do would be utterly impossible without your specialized talents. I still think it is foolish of Duke to endanger the profitable—ah—laundry business my little establishment has built up during the past two years by joining the Dragon.. But like all Americans he's unable to resist a quick clean-up. A large sum in cash offered by the Dragon Master for a single job tonight fired Duke's greed. It is indeed regrettable."

"When are we gonna meet this guy we're supposed to address as 'Master'?" the man called "Flash" asked complainingly.

But the bespectacled laundryman at the wheel did not answer. He was too busy. The truck ahead, in which the Chinese rode, had begun to roll toward the opposite end of the alley, and he was quickly following.

Both shiny trucks rolled out into the street, and for three quarters of an hour their drivers worked their way across town by darkened side streets until at last they came to a building sitting alone at the edge of a small city park. Years before, the park and the building had been the private grounds and museum of a multi-millionaire. On his death, it had been willed to the city.

It was dark with the loneliness of midnight around the building, near which the trucks presently stopped. Up ahead one of the Chinese got out and disappeared into the night. Ten minutes later, he returned as silently as he had come, getting in beside the driver again.

"Everything is quiet," he informed in sing-song Chinese. "I saw nobody. There is a light in the watchman's cubbyhole at the back. Drive straight ahead without lights and pull up near the large door at the back."

Inside the marble halls of the building an elderly watchman in striped overalls made his rounds, punching his clock at regular stations along the dimly lit corridors. It was about twelve-thirty and time for him to lunch. He punched in the last station, went back among the glassed-in cases to his little room at the back, sat down on a bench in a corner and opened his dinner pail.

As he ate, a new sound suddenly obtruded itself. The watchman paused, cocking an intent ear to listen. Again it came—a faint clicking from in back, He could not recognize the sound, for he could not guess that it was made as Flash probed the vitals of the locked door with an instrument as delicate and as specialized as those used by a brain surgeon. Already, Flash had located the wires of the alarm system and burned them out with a torch.

The watchman put down his lunch and hurried out into the main building again, padding along with revolver in hand. He slipped through a room whose walls were covered with modern paintings and into the hallway leading to the back. He had almost reached the rear door when a menacing voice came from somewhere behind him.

"Just drop the roscoe, pal, like a good guy."

Glides Forth to Terrorize the Underworld!

The watchman whirled, making one single motion to lift his gun. He never got it up. The big 38 Police Special in the hand of the determined man who had spoken, rose and fell against his skull. The watchman's muffled cry was cut short, and the man who had attacked him caught him as he slumped.

He shoved the bleeding watchman to two other men who appeared dimly in the shadows.

"Take him back to his place and stay with him," he ordered gruffly. "If he wakes up, whack him over the head again. Flash, get a couple of those Chinese to give you a hand with your cutting outfit. According to one of the guys who shows the rubbernecks around, the vault is downstairs. Come on."

THE two mobsters each took the watchman by a wrist and began dragging his limp form back along the polished floor. Flash directed two of the husky Chinese to pick up the huge, heavy suitcases containing his acetylene and oxygen tanks. He himself carried the torch and it was no ordinary one. It had cost him exactly two thousand dollars.

Down two dark flights of steps the party moved cautiously and silently. Bringing up the rear were several Chinese carrying ordinary canvas stretchers. Once they stopped and held flashlights while Flash knelt before a door and inserted an instrument into the lock. After a few moments' expert manipulation, it clicked. They went down still another flight into a vault room deep beneath the earth's surface.

One of the Chinese who made up one half of the queerly assorted group looked dubious at the sight of the massive door of the vault with its chilled steel. Flash saw the look, and chuckled, low in his throat.

"Sure, it's burglar-proof, pal, but don't worry," he said, and grinned broadly. "It takes heat to make steel burglar-proof, maybe you know. So all you got to do to cut it is to get something hotter. That's why this torch cost me two thousand slugs. It was made in Berlin by a screwy little professor. One of them scientific birds."

"You are quite sure the alarm system has been disconnected?" the Chinese who appeared to be in charge of his coterie asked uncertainly.

"He knows his business, buddy," growled a burly gangster impatiently. "Hurry up, Flash, and get that toy of yours busy."

The "expert" put on goggles, stuffed cotton plugs into his ears, adjusted the two gauges to more than four times the ordinary pressure on the short red and green hoses, and snapped a flint lighter to the torch. Yellow flame lashed out, then shortened, giving way to a blue light with such hissing intensity that it grated painfully into eardrums like steel scraped across glass.

While the others stood around with palms over their ears, Flash Mega, who long ago had gained a reputation with the police for the facility with which he could handle just such a situation, set to work with the torch. Steel that would withstand the bite of an ordinary flame as though it were nothing but a lighted match soon began to give way as the torch ate viciously into metal. The white-hot stuff bubbled and foamed and ran down to splatter on the concrete floor in molten drops. For five minutes the cracksman worked the torch in a circular motion that ate a three-inch-wide hole deeper and deeper into metal.

Only an expert welder could have cut such s hole more than six inches deep into metal, due to back heat melting the tip of the torch. Yet presently the flame ate through, started a circular cut around the spokes of the vault door handle, and completed it. Flash shut off the torch, picked up a tiny crowbar that was almost a jimmy, pried loose the mechanism and let it crash to the floor, leaving a gaping hole two feet in diameter.

The laundryman who had been so dubious stared in disbelief. Flash had cut through eighteen inches of solid burglar-proof steel! The cracksman grinned at Chow Seto, the Chinese who on other occasions than this was known as an innocuous laundry-man, but said nothing.

The vault door swung open and the master cracksman packed up his outfit. Chow Seto, followed by the others went inside the vault. Several small crates were stacked in a corner. The bespectacled Chinese laundryman took a single look at the contents of one, then nodded to the others.

"This is it, gentlemen," he announced. "In these boxes we have a treasure worth approximately ten to eleven million dollars."

A BIG mobster who had been called Joe—Joe Mega, the brother of the expert Flash—gave a harsh laugh as he bent and picked up a green object from a box. It was of corroded bronze.

"A ceremonial vase of the Shang Dynasty, seventeen hundred and sixty-six to eleven hundred and twenty-two years before the coming of Christ," informed Chow Seto blandly. "One of the few things I learned at Columbia University before finding out that the—ah—laundry business pays better than a knowledge of the value of things of great antiquity."

"You mean to tell me that dopes pay millions for this junk?" demanded Joe in disbelief, juggling the precious vessel up and down in his hands. "Well, pal, it's a good thing the Duke didn't put me wise when I cased this joint for him or I'da told him he was nuts!"

Chow Seto almost winced as he quickly took the treasure from the hood's careless hands. He delivered rapid orders in Cantonese and the men brought in the stretchers. Quickly and efficiently, the Orientals picked up the small crates and placed them on the stretchers to carry to the waiting trucks. In that treasure were altar pieces from the Sixth Century, a Tang filigree gold crown once worn by an empress, Sung paintings on silk that rolled up like papyrus, delicate white Ting Yao pottery and other antiques for which a collector would have sold his soul. Case after case was carried up the stairs and outside, where it was loaded into the guarded trucks.

Two of the mobsters were the last to come out of the building. They climbed into a truck and Joe's voice called to them from the front sharply.

"What about that watchman, Manni?"

"You never did know your own strength. Joe," came the laconic reply from the gangster called Manni, who among his intimates—and to the police—was known as Manni Torrio. "The guy's dead, Joe—that's all."

The trucks got under way, leaving behind a gaping back door. Silence descended over the place that had become a hall of death for an elderly watchman whose only crime had been that he had tried to fulfill his duty.

The Dragon had struck!

CHAPTER II

The Dragon Strikes Again

THREE quarters of an hour later, the trucks were back at the place from which they had started. One of the Orientals knocked on the back door of the house beside the alleyway, and it was opened shortly by an elderly Chinese. Low orders were voiced and again the Orientals got busy.

Within short minutes, the door had swallowed up crates, stretchers and men. Chow Seto's two trucks rolled out and departed. The Chinese gunman himself, however, did not accompany them.

Inside the building the six American gangsters made their way along an ordinary passage where ancient boards creaked underfoot. The art collection had been taken away hurriedly, ahead of them. The aged Chinese led them through a door and down a flight of steps and along still another passage, the musty air of the catacombslike place filling their lungs, half choking them.

The narrow way was lit by a dim electric light bulb over another door. This door, the trained eyes of the mobsters saw at once, was made of steel.

"Where's Chow?" asked Flash, before they reached the door. "I thought he was with us."

"Search me," Joe growled, and shrugged.

In front of the steel door the party came to a halt in a single file while the aged Oriental reached out a foot, unseen, and pressed twice on a thin, purposely warped board. Beneath that board was an electric button that sounded a buzzer inside. Two rings would cause that door to open. But woe to him who stood before it unaware that his weight was sounding a warning that an enemy was without!

For a moment, nothing was heard except the rasping breathing of the men standing in the cramped, musty, passage, with heads bent to avoid scraping the rafters above. Then there came a metallic click as an electrically operated bolt was withdrawn and the door swung inward.

Flash, directly behind the aged Chinese, gave a muffled gasp of admiration as he peered over the old man's head.

Standing demurely with hands tucked in the sleeves of her embroidered pink silk Oriental costume was a Chinese girl of breathtaking beauty! About nineteen or twenty, Flash quickly judged.

"The Dragon Master welcomes the new members, Dragons," she said, in English, and in a cultured voice. "You will follow me."

She turned and led the way.

"Get a load of that baby, Joe," Flash Mega muttered to his brother over his shoulder. "But hands off her! She's mine."

"Nix," his burly brother grunted, scowling. "It's bad enough to take a blood oath in a damn Chinese secret society without you muffin' the works by fallin' for a good-looking dame. You go monkeying around with her and you'll get in trouble. Dames and business don't mix. You know what Duke's orders are—keep our mouths shut and obey the orders of this Dragon Master guy we're goin' to see."

The mobsters followed the girl down a short flight of broad stone steps into the basementlike room, which was some forty-five or fifty feet square. Its floor was two stories below street level—and stepping into that room was like stepping into another world.

The place was decorated like a secret worship room in some ancient palace of old China. Rich drapes of Oriental splendor hung from the walls and thick rugs of untold value covered the concrete floor. There were no chairs. With a wave of her hand, the girl directed the mobsters to sofas.

There were at least thirty Chinese present, as well as some Americans, though Chow Seto and the group of Chinese who had been in the trucks were missing. Some of the Chinese men were young, with American hair cuts, and wearing American clothes. These Orientals held various positions in private homes, in cafés, and in laundries and art shops throughout the city. Others were little shopkeepers in Chinatown, and they wore the raiment that was their ancient heritage. And one Oriental's horny hands proclaimed him a farmer who had come from outside the city.

FLASH MEGA'S black eyes watched speculatively as the girl moved lightly across the room toward other broad stone steps leading up to an opening in the drapes, Joe saw the look on the face of his brother, and quickly realized its import.

"Lay off, Flash!" he growled again, jabbing a sharp elbow. "Dames are gonna get you in plenty trouble some of these days."

The girl who held Flash Mega's attention to the exclusion of all else crossed the room and ascended the short flight of steps. Here was a sort of stone altar surmounted by a carved dragon's head, in whose two eyes glowed two tiny red electric bulbs. The girl disappeared through the drapes.

The red bulbs forming the dragon's eyes above the men blinked three times and it grew quiet in the smoke-filled room, the sing-song Cantonese of the Orientals instantly dying down. The drapes parted again and a man stepped through, bowing low in obeisance to the dragon altar, his long-nailed hands outstretched. Robes of green silk covered him from neck to the floor, and a weird green mask in the shape of a dragon's head concealed his features.

He straightened and his eyes surveyed the silent watchers below. When he spoke, it was in a curiously high-pitched voice.

"I am the Dragon Master," he intoned. "Tonight the Dragon has performed a great service. Recently there was brought to this country from China certain priceless works of art to the value of many millions of dollars. The money was to be used as a war chest to buy badly needed airplanes for our country in her fight against an aggressor.

"Eight bankers and other financiers looked over the collection, and then formed what was known as 'Eight Incorporated' for the purpose of purchasing the treasure. However, these financiers quickly became victims of their own greed. Their art experts appraised the treasure at only eight millions of dollars, instead of the ten or eleven millions suggested as their worth by Dr. Ling, whose ability to fix an evaluation cannot be doubted."

The figure in green paused. Flash Mega spoke to his brother in an aside. His lips did not move, and his narrowed eyes were intent on the Dragon Master.

"That guy's voice is disguised, Joe—I'd lay a bet on it. There's something familiar about it, too. You reckon that's why Duke ain't here? You reckon it's him playing this Dragon business? Or do you think that the guy in that green thing is Chow Seto?"

He got an elbow jab and a surly, low-voiced growl for an answer, and the Dragon Master went on.

'It was then that I enlisted the services of our new American members," the high-pitched voice droned. "Tonight, with the aid of these new brothers, we have done the impossible. We have taken the treasure from a vault that was impregnable, and we will hold it until these evil eight are made to realize their foolhardiness. We shall again demand that ten millions in cash immediately be raised for its return, the money eventually to be paid over to proper representatives of the Chinese government."

"Just supposing they call your bluff like they did on the first note, pal?" put in Flash Mega, a disdainful grin crossing his face. Flash was not the sort to be impressed even by this pageantry before him.

"You underestimate the new society of which you are now a blood brother, Dragon," the Dragon Master said coldly. "Of course they again will refuse. So, I have planned accordingly, They must be given proof that the Dragons mean business. Already I have selected the—shall we say victim?—whose ultimate fate will bring them to their senses. In this city lives one of the evil eight—a blind man who once was a district attorney. One Tony Quinn by name. He lives alone in his mansion with a single man servant. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

A snarling, bitter curse rumbled deep in Joe Mega's heavy chest. Rage sent the dark red blood into his swarthy face, and his merciless eyes blazed.

"I oughta know the damned district attorney!" he shouted. "He sent two of the mob up the river before his eyes were put out by acid thrown at him. One of the guys was a special pal of mine. Duke's got it in for him too—been swearing to get even with Quinn ever since!"

A chuckle came from the Dragon Master, though there was nothing pleasant in the sound.

"I think Duke need not trouble himself to seek revenge any longer. That will be done for him most efficiently, and you two may come along to witness it. As you possibly know, when the collection first was appraised, Harvey Belmont and the other men comprising Eight Incorporated presented Quinn with a little green jade Buddha in appreciation of certain of his former public services. It seems that he had broken up a gang attempting to blackmail Mr. Belmont and some of his friends. Tomorrow morning Quinn's body will be found, his neck broken and the jade Buddha beside him. Wrapped around the Buddha will be a note with our demands that unless the full ten millions, on which they first agreed, is paid at once, that the others will suffer a like fate."

"Supposing they don't come up with the dough?" put in Manni Torrio, also dubious.

"Then one by one the financiers whose greed was responsible for what has happened tonight will die violently and at once," the Dragon Master said without a single change in the monotone of his voice.

"Listen, pal," Flash Mega sneered, "I'm with you to the limit, and I sure want to be present when that ex-district attorney goes on his last ride. But don't go getting any foolish ideas about Commissioner Warner and his cops. One false move on your part and we'll all end up doing a Chinese fandango in the hot seat."

The Dragon Master did not answer that, but clapped his long-nailed hands twice.

"Observe!" he intoned.

THE drapes behind him parted and the most astounding person the mob had ever set eyes upon waddled through on dwarfed, crooked legs!

The man—or was he actually man?—was a Chinese not more than four and one half feet in height, yet weighing a full one hundred and sixty pounds. His pinhead with its huge ears was shaved slick until it glistened, except for a tiny topknot of black hair. The creature had no neck. Only a lump of muscle that looked to be as hard as iron was humped at the base of the small, bullet-shaped skull. It disappeared into shoulders that were a mass of muscle. The arms were abnormally long, almost touching the floor.

The brown monstrosity was stripped to the waist, the dwarfed legs being encased in black silk knee trousers cut short at the huge, knotted calves. No shoes were on the huge, twisted feet. Something in the set of the grotesque and misshapen body with the long dangling arms was remindful of a giant chimpanze. The abnormality looked about with a pair of keen, intelligent, close-set eyes and then up at the Dragon Master.

"This is Ohmo," announced the man in green. "Do not be misled by his looks, for he is a most valuable asset to us. Ohmo is a mute and understands no English. He is quite harmless if left alone, but will blindly obey any order given by me."

"I get it!" The cracksman grinned, then laughed aloud. "You're sending this guy to pay a call on the honorable ex-district attorney, huh?"

"He will be taken to pay a call on the honorable ex-district attorney," corrected the Dragon Master. "The rest of you Dragons will return to your respective positions throughout the city, unless you"—he looked directly at Flash Mega—"care to go along. For the rest of you, there is much work to be done. One Dragon already has his full instructions which will be carried out upon word from his Dragon Master. That particular Dragon will know who I mean, for he serves as personal servant to Harvey Belmont. That is all. You may go."

He spoke in Cantonese to the pinheaded monstrosity and it waddled back out of sight on short, bowed legs. The Dragon Master then stepped back a single step, bowed low to the altar again, with his long-nailed hands outstretched, and disappeared through the curtains.

The Dragon Master was gone.

CHAPTER III

Monster in the Night

IN the well-equipped gymnasium of his home that evening, Tony Quinn, stripped to a pair of white trunks, stood locked toe to toe, and struggled with all his strength to break the hold of the man whose clean-shaven head gleamed under the ceiling light. The man's underslung, aggressive jaw was clamped tight and nothing could be heard but the harsh breathing of the two struggling men. Then the former district attorney relaxed and let his weight sag.

There was a final grunt, a heave, and at the moment Quinn stopped long enough to get a fresh breath he unexpectedly went sailing through the air to land with a thud on the thick wrestling mat.

"How did that happen?" he complained, as he sat up, looking startled.

Jack "Butch" O'Leary, his wrestling mate, straightened his massive shoulders and grinned at the ludicrous look of surprise on Quinn's face.

"That's what you get for not shifting your weight like I've been drumming into you, Boss," he said, chuckling. The result was no surprise to a former boxer like O'Leary. "Just another case of keeping one jump ahead of your opponent," he said offhandedly. "Or, as you've heard it said—Jack Dempsey's famous remark, remember?—not forgetting to duck. You learn that in boxing as well as wrestling. Sorry I had to pull that one on you, Boss, but it'll teach you never to be off guard. You've learned fast."

"I've learned enough for this evening, anyhow, Butch," Quinn said, snapping upright in a flip-up. "As a ju-jutsu teacher you're tops. Anyway, it passes the time, doesn't it? Not much else to do. It's been pretty quiet lately."

"Quite right, sir," put in Silk Norton, Quinn's ever-ready right-hand man, valet and confidante, who had been standing by quietly watching the lsssona in the ancient Japanese art of ju-jutsu. "For myself, I'm satisfied. There have been plenty of times since I've been trying to master this rather strenuous avocation of ours when I've almost wished for the peace of my former profession."

Quinn smiled at that, for before Silk Norton's reformation, the little man had been a safe cracker par excellence.

Quinn was still smiling as he got into the glassed-in shower, watching his unconventional valet lay out blue silk pajamas and a red silk dressing gown. The little ex-confidence man who, hungry and desperate, had come in the night to rob him and had remained to become a faithful valet and valued friend would no more be content to play a role of idleness when it came to facing the foes of law and order than the others who made up the former district attorney's little circle. Beneath that high, bald forehead and the air of general slipperiness that exuded from him lay a keen brain that loved excitement. More than a score of times that brain had proved a valuable asset to Quinn in the strange role Fate had destined him to play.

Quinn turned on the water. Seen under the dying spray his body was act strikingly muscular, but it was tall and well built. Strength and speed were packed into the supple lines that were deceptive.

To the world that knew about him, Anthony Quinn, once a virile, upstanding representative of law forces whose name had held terror for evildoers, was now an impotent blind man whose sight had been permanently destroyed by acid thrown at him in a crowded courtroom, and whose face was horribly scarred about the eyes. Day by day he could be seen tapping his way about the grounds of his estate or along the street near his home, sometimes led by the faithful Silk.

But for a long time he had seemed to live in a world apart. To those who paused long enough to give him a fleeting thought, the former brilliant public servant appeared to be a retiring man hiding himself from the world and his former friends because of deep disgust with life and sensitiveness over his affliction.

SUCH actually had been the case during the long months when Tony Quinn had lived in a sea of blackness. But Nature had been as kind as possible, giving him something in return for what had been taken from him. As a result, he had since realized that his senses of touch, smell, and hearing were far more acute than formerly. Under his sensitive fingers whatever he touched had begun to tell strange new stories. His sense of smell had sharpened. His ears had become the ears of a hound, picking up with ease and sifting multitudinous sounds that once had been inaudible.

More months had gone by until, in the darkness of a lonely night, a girl with golden hair and blue eyes had come in through an open window like an angel out of nowhere to offer him hope where eye specialists had said there was no hope. Through a delicate operation by an unknown small-town surgeon, the corneas of the eyes of Carol Baldwin's policeman father—dying from paralysis brought on by a gangster bullet—had been given to him.

An extraordinary thing had occurred. When at last Tony Quinn had been allowed to remove the bandages, he had been astounded by the miracle that had happened. His were the eyes of darkness as well as the eyes of day!

His were the eyes of a—black bat!

Because he had recognized this himself, it had given the former district attorney the inspiration for his life work. And now the name of the Black Bat that he had taken for himself in a self-imposed crusade against crime had become almost legendary. By night he had become that figure of terror to the underworld—the Black Bat who prowled wherever evil stalked, and met it on its own grounds.

Unhampered by the red tape that tied the hands of men who were sworn to preserve law and order, and with professional ethics of his former position shuffled off, he had hecome a shadowy Nemesis of Crime who brought panic to the underworld. Gangsters who long had been waxing fat and rich behind the protection of high-priced lawyers found themselves unprotected and at the mercy of a terrible avenger who, unknown and often unseen, fought them tooth and nail. The Black Bat met threat by action, intimidation by retaliation.

Quinn, fresh and virile, with nothing physical to indicate that he was the Black Bat, came out of his shower, dressed and went into the living room to his favorite chair by the open fireplace. The damp, early summer night was warm and Silk Norton had pulled back the heavy drapes and opened the French windows to let in the night's damp coolness. After Butch O'Leary, the other man of the trio whe were Tony Quinn's two closest personal allies, had gone out through the secret tunnel to his boarding house a few blocks away, the slippery little valet came in carrying a glass of cold milk.

"Could I get you anything else, sir?" he asked, as he handed it to the supposedly blind man.

Silk was about forty, and a master at makeup and voice imitation. His perfect imitation of Quinn's voice more than once had fooled Captain McGrath of Homicide, when the keen policeman long suspicious that Quinn was the Black Bat, had phoned while the Black Bat was on the prowl.

"You can bring the new book on Chinese art you got for me, Silk," answered Quinn, setting down the empty glass. "I've become quite interested in the subject. I'm going to read a few hours before turning in."

"Very good, sir."

Silk brought the book from the library and then retired on noiseless feet, seeming to glide from the room. Quinn settled himself deeper into his chair to read into the small hours of the morning, as was his custom. The house grew deadly quiet. Midnight came and still Quinn read on. From somewhere off in the night came the faint, gloomy boom of a clock striking two.

QUINN did not quite know when the first foreign sounds penetrated his sensitive ears and told him he was not alone in the room. But the half raised book suddenly slid down beside him in the chair. At the same time, there came a strange human smell to his sensitive nostrils.

Then a huge hand reached over the back of the chair as he ducked and shot up, wheeling to face a sight that sent the hair raising itself along the nape of his neck.

Standing at the back of his chair was a grotesque caricature of a human being, naked to the waist, and looking like some abysmal brute out of the Neanderthal Age. Its glistening pinhead was sunk deep between the enormously wide shoulders like the sharp, slick head of a monster sea turtle protruding from its shell. A Chinese, undoubtedly, Quinn saw at that first swift glance, and the horrible being had paused for a split second, the green jade Buddha he had taken from another room clutched in one of the creature's oversized hands. But only for a split second.

Now, as Quinn faced it, the thing dropped the Buddha and sprang through the air like a giant chimpanzee!

Quinn's right foot unconsciously had sought the cleverly hidden light switch that Butch had placed under the edge of the carpet for just such an emergency. His slippered foot clicked out the lights and plunged the room into darkness.

And the moment the lights went out Tony Quinn, ex-district attorney, became the Black Bat!

He flung himself sideward as the Thing cleared the distance separating them. It struck the exact spot where he had stood, a faint whistling sound emanating from its nostrils as it landed. He guessed then that the monster was a mute. It wheeled to pounce again upon its prey but the prey had become a flitting shadow. The Bat melted into the folds of the drapes against the wall.

The Thing's keen ears, however, caught the faint rustle inaudible to ordinary human ears and it whirled, leaping toward the spot. This time it caught its quarry. A hand with fingers like steel prongs closed over the Bat's wrist and crushed down. The bones almost gave way under the pressure. Quinn had not yelled for help—it had all happened too swiftly. Besides, the lessons Butch had so painstakingly taught him during the past weeks were standing him in good stead.

He let his weight sag against that of his attacker for a moment, just as Butch had done earlier in the evening. An arm shot out at the deformed body. Then, in the pitch darkness of the room, there was a flurry of bodies, that faint whistling sound from the mute thug again, and the Thing hit the floor flat on its back with a jar that shook the house.

Such a terrific fall would have knocked the wind from an ordinary human and broken its grasp, but the monster's steel-banded fingers encircling the Bat's wrist only clamped down the harder—crushed until the bones threatened to crack. A moan of pain burst from the Bat's lips and he opened them to shout. But before he could yell out, the Thing's other hand shot out from the floor and grabbed his ankle with the same crushing force. The hand jerked, and the Bat went down. His wrist was released and a paralyzing blow that almost broke his neck caught him just below the ear.

Ju-jitsu!

The whole world spun crazily before Quinn's pain-filled eyes. He was lifted as though he had been a child and thrown across the Thing's shoulders. As agilely as a monkey the Oriental monstrosity went out through the open French window to the ground, carrying the jade Buddha clasped in one huge hand.

It set off at a rocking run across the grounds, and even in his half paralyzed state, Tony Quinn found himself amazed that even a half-human Thing like this, with such short, bowed legs, could move so fast. It slipped through the shrubbery, peered furtively about the dimly lit street, then loped on with its human burden across a back lot. Presently a large laundry truck loomed up near a row of trees.

A MAN got out from under the wheel and stepped to the ground as Quinn was carried to the truck. There was something vaguely familiar about this man but, half dazed as Quinn was, it eluded his memory at the moment. And when still another man got out of the rear of the truck, his looks also touched some chord of recognition uncertainly.

Then the ex-district attorney had it—when he saw the diamonds! These two were the notorious gangsters Flash Mega and his brother Joe! He had reason to remember them only too well during the time he had been in offlce—and to know the leader of the gang to which they belonged. "Duke" Kasini! For some reason Quinn had been kidnapped by a Chinese thug who was being aided by members of Kasini's big mob!

Flash chuckled softly in the darkness as he held open the doors of the truck for Quinn to be carried inside. Not for a moment did one of those oversized hands of the distorted Oriental relax its grip on the captive's pinioned ones, and in them was the strength of a gorilla's hands. The Thing straddled his captive on the floor of the truck, looking inquiringly toward the muffled figure in green silk robes sitting on a seat near the front. The Dragon Master—though Tony Quinn could not yet know that. He did, however, recognize the man's speech when he murmured his approval in Cantonese.

"Master," Flash Mega said with a chuckle, "I take off my hat to this monkey man of yours. But he didn't kill him—yet—did he?"

"Ohmo never disobeys the orders of the Dragon Master," the man addressed intoned, in a curiously high-pitched voice. "I ordered him to bring this man alive, that you might witness but one of the many things I have taught him. Now, to the City Hall."

Joe Mega got back under the wheel. The creature now identified by the name, Ohmo, held Quinn in a deadly grip as those steel-banded fingers held his pinioned wrists as in a vise. As the truck eased away into the early morning darkness, Quinn's bat eyes saw the Dragon Master take a piece of paper from his green robes and wrap it around the jade Buddha, snapping it snug with a rubber band. A note that probably would be left beside his body, Quinn knew instinctively.

For Tony Quinn was certain that Kasini and his mob, joining up with some kind of a secret society of thugs, had helped kidnap him only because—they meant to leave him dead on the steps of the City Hall, or somewhere nearby.

These two gangsters had good reasons for wishing him dead. Quinn well realized that during his term as district attorney he had prosecuted hood after hood and sent them up the river. Some of the men had talked. Among things Quinn had learned was that Duke Kasini made regular trips to China to buy huge shipments of opium and smuggle it in by way of Marseilles and other European ports. He was well known in Shanghai where he worked hand in glove with dealers in the poppy.

Of course this information had been passed along to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics at Washington, but nothing had come of it to date, though men had been working on the tip assiduously. Knowing that a man was guilty, and securing enough concrete evidence to bring him to trial were two entirely different things.

The truck jolted on, working its way by devious side streets toward City Hall. Quinn had not moved. By now Flash had climbed over into the front seat beside his brother. And by now the grip on Tony Quinn's pinioned wrists had relaxed a trifle.

Joe Mega turned around then in the front seat, and spoke to the sinister figure in green.

"The City Hall's just around the block," he said. "But I still think—" and the mobster, callous murderer that he was, suppressed a slight shiver—"that a roscoe would do the job better. I don't mind bumpin' guys off, but that ape gives me the creeps."

The laundry truck swung sharply around a corner, swaying. The Dragon Master spoke in Cantonese to the half naked Chinese still astride Quinn's pajama-clad body. Quinn moved then. He snapped up and heaved hard, grabbing at the jade Buddha beside the green-robed leader. As Ohmo fell sideward and turned like a cat, the jade piece in Quinn's hand smashed him alongside his shaved head. He fell like a log.

"Look out," yelled Flash Mega. "The guy's blind, but he's dangerous!"

His gun came up, but Quinn already had made a headlong dive and landed atop both Flash and his brother, at the wheel. The gun went clattering. Joe Mega fell over the wheel and the truck lurched wildly, smashing a front fender against a street light standard. The impact threw open the left door just as Quinn grabbed at the handle. He fell out over Mega, tumbling headlong to the pavement. He caught a brief flash of concrete coming up, heard the sudden wail of a siren as a police car shot into view down the street, and then stars exploded in his brain.

He was still sprawled unconscious on the pavement in his silk dressing gown, with the jade Buddha beside him, when more police cars and an ambulance arrived. In one of the cars were Police Commissioner Warner and Captain McGrath of Homicide.

CHAPTER IV

Dragon Master's Ultimatum

AT ten o'clock the following morning three police cars conveying two black limousines drew up in front of the curb at Tony Quinn's estate. A number of men, including two Chinese, got out of the two shiny machines and came up the walk to the house, followed by the uniformed police who stopped to wait outside on guard when the others entered. Two more policemen patrolled the grounds.

Silk opened the front door and ushered the visitors into the spacious sitting room hung with heavy, expensive drapes.

"How's Tony, Silk?" asked rugged, gray-haired Commissioner Warner as the valet murmured to them to be seated.

A worried frown crossed the little man's sharp, pointed face.

"A very bad fall he had, sir. But he's managed to get out of bed to see you and give you more details of his unfortunate experience. Permit me to thank you, sir, on my own account for such quick action on the part of the police after I heard the commotion and discovered that he was missing."

Silk disappeared and Captain McGrath, always suspicious of Tony Quinn, whom he firmly believed, but could not prove, to be the Black Bat, let his eyes rove around the room as he reached for a cigar. McGrath was beefy-faced, and heavy-shouldered, with the tenacity of a bulldog. Duty was a fetish with him, and it was for this reason that he was determined, sooner or later, to catch Tony Quinn red-handed at his night-prowling activities, much as he liked the man. But such was Captain McGrath's stern creed that, had such evidence to warrant it been placed in his hands, he would have arrested his own brother for an infringement of the law as quickly as he would run in the lowest criminal in town.

"Maybe he's not hurt as bad as he's letting on," the captain grunted, biting off the end of the cigar. "The ambulance surgeon said it was only a bad lick on the head."

Before Commissioner Warner could answer, Quinn, guided by his valet, came in, tapping his way with a cane. From beneath the white bandage on his head his dead-looking eyes stared lifelessly ahead like two pools of colored glass. His face was pale and drawn—thanks to some ministration on the part of the clever Silk, though the visitors would never have guessed this. He looked ready to collapse, though waving away Warner's apologies for having brought him out of bed in this condition.

"By all means don't discourage the captain, Commissioner," he added, his voice weak and uncertain as he almost collapsed into a chair. "By the way, did he buy that rubber reducing belt I suggested?"

A LAUGH at McGrath's expense went around the room. His rapidly expanding middle was as sore a spot in his mind as his corns sometimes were to his feet. He bit down viciously on the unlit cigar.

"Go ahead and laugh," he growled. "But here's something you won't laugh off. I'm betting a month's pay that, after last night's little affair—you getting slugged right after we get news about that big museum being robbed of millions—that the Black Bat goes into action again."

Commissioner Warner had already briefly informed Quinn of that huge robbery, in which Quinn himself had a personal interest, since he was a member of Eight Incorporated who had contracted to buy it.

"And I'm betting another month's pay," the captain added grimly, "that this time I slap the cuffs on him. Any takers?"

"Captain, this is too good for an invalid to miss, so I'll take both bets," answered Quinn, smiling wanly. "And now, Commissioner, what can a helpless blind man do to help you gentlemen?"

Warner made the introductions, presenting the two Chinese first. Colonel Wang was thin, bespectacled, an army officer who appeared to speak but little English and this brokenly. His object in coming to America was twofold, he had told the commissioner, who relayed the information.

He had accompanied the fabulous treasure that had been brought to this country from China a month before, so that its sale should help the Chinese Government to purchase more guns, ammunition and planes. The Chinese colonel had been in charge of the armed Chinese guards who had guarded it with their lives. His second mission here was to select and test-hop the military planes that were to be bought and shipped back to China.

Professor Ling, the other Chinese, was a scholarly-looking little man in high white collar and business suit. With his wispy gray mustache and thin chin whiskers he looked much like a masquerading Mandarin patriarch who would have felt more at home in heavily embroidered robes of state. He owned an art antique shop in Chinatown and at one time had been curator of Eastern arts at the museum where the collection had been stolen.

Walter Dugro, one of the American visitors, was still tanned and rugged in spite of his fifty or so years. Some time before, he had taken over a bankrupt light plane factory and reorganized the business for the production of military planes. It was his deadly new experimental twin-engined bomber that Colonel Wang had been putting through its paces.

Warner introduced Paul Chivor next. About thirty-five or so, affable, and a flying soldier-of-fortune, Chivor was a handsome man who appeared to be well educated, cultured, and who spoke Cantenese fluently. For the most part he acted as interpreter for Colonel Wang.

Naturally, Quinn knew the four bankers. Harvey Belmont, thin and aristocratic, was their recognized leader, and the others were Thompson, Harrison and Heffner. When Quinn had been district attorney, he had broken up a blackmail gang that had tried to swindle them, though he had small personal liking for any of them. They were all too eager for profit.

Quinn himself had wanted them to pay the full ten millions for the treasure, even though he had intended to turn over any excess profits he should make from the transaction to the Chinese

Government when the treasure later would be sold for a still higher figure.

That was all an aside now, in Tony Quinn's mind, for his attention was on Commissioner Warner whose chief interest, at present, was in what had happened to the former district attorney the night before,

"First of all, Tony," the commissioner said, "you weren't in condition to tell coherently what happened when we brought you home at four this morning. So I'd like you to relate everything now to McGrath and myself."

He took from his pocket the green jade Buddha and put it on the table.

TONY QUINN could have told more the night before, had he cared to. He had deliberately declined to do so for two reasons. He wanted McGrath to think he was more badly hurt than he was, and he had wanted these men to come here, just as they now had come.

He told again of the attack, but omitted certain details. He did describe how be had been carried, half paralyzed, on a pair of naked shoulders to the truck from which he had eventually escaped. But be made no mention of having recognized his kidnappers. Despite the fact that the Bat usually made every possible effort to cooperate with the police to the fullest, he felt on this occasion he was justified in withholding this information. To give it would be to invite a renewed attempt on his life. He wanted the killer mob to feel secure for the moment.

He told of overhearing their plans, however, of happening to grasp the Buddha in his struggle with the thug, and of his blind dive toward the front of the truck in a desperate effort to cause a smash-up. The bulldog McGrath interrupted.

"How'd you know which end of the truck was the front?" he demanded suspiciously. "You were struggling with this ape Thing and you say you were confused—"

"McGrath," gritted Warner in downright anger, "this is the last straw. I've warned you time and again that my patience would run out. Well, this morning, you're going on a plainclothes beat in Chinatown to direct the dragnet of officers down there—captain or not. We'll see how your feet like that for awhile!"

"But, Commissioner," interceded Tony Quinn, wanting the Homicide captain any place except down there, "please don't be so harsh on the captain. I'm sure he means nothing personal."

But Warner stood pat.

"And now, gentlemen," he said to the others around him, "you again see what you're up against. Naturally, we're making every effort to recover the treasure. Suspects at the rate of nearly a hundred an hour are being brought in by the police dragnet. So far we've found nothing, nor do I expect to. After reading the note from this Dragon society which has been defiant enough to admit they were responsible for the robbery, I know we're not up against amateurs.

"Whether or not you wish to pay the money they demand is your affair, though I advise against it. I brought you here to listen to Quinn's story, so you'll know the risk you're taking. It's plain enough to me he was kidnapped, as the most available of you members of Eight Incorporated, meaning to kill him to serve as an example to the rest of you what to expect, if you held out.

"It seems unbelievable that an up-to-the-date vault of burglar-proof steel has been cut open. But the fact remains that it has been, that the treasure is gone, and that the city, as owners of the museum, is responsible to the Chinese Government and its ambassador for several millions of dollars. And now, Tony, perhaps you would like to have me read that note for you."

He opened the note and read:

> To Those Concerned: Honorable greetings and a final warning from the Dragon. You have been given one chance to pay to a beleagured country the full value of the treasure, ten millions of dollars. You have been given one warning of what would happen should you fail to do so. Should the honorable morning papers carry the story that the guilty Eight Incorporated refuse our just demands, then others will suffer the Death of the Dragon before another day dawns. Your police protection will be of no avail.
>
> The Dragon Master has spoken.

A short silence followed. Tony Quinn sat woodenly, his dead eyes in his bandaged head staring lifelessly into space. Finally, McGrath spoke up again.

"Are you real sure you can't idenify something about those guys— something they said or did?" he demanded. "You didn't by any chance feel a diamond as big as a coconut on the hand of one of them, did you?"

QUINN had to admire the tenacious officer. McGrath already had catalogued every cracksman in town who might have been able to have opened that supposedly impregnable vault. And a logical conclusion had been Flash Mega, always identifiable by his diamonds.

"If you're referring to Duke Kasini's mob, Captain," Quinn said, "it wouldn't hurt to look them up. Though I gather from what my valet has read to me that they've been laying low since Federal agents from the Narcotics Bureau recently confiscated nearly a quarter of a million dollars worth of their opium aboard a tanker. As I understand it, however, it could not definitely be pinned on Duke as the man who had brought it in, so he was freed again."

Harvey Belmont spoke up then, twisting and gripping his thin fingers nervously. But the eyes that went to the worried police commissioner were stubbornly uncompromising.

"Gentlemen, I'm going to speak bluntly," he said. "My colleagues and myself—aside from Quinn—are business men, not philanthropists. As chairman of Eight Incorporated, I organized the concern for the purpose of buying the Chinese art collection and holding it for later sale under more favorable conditions. Naturally, I'm upset that the city must be held responsible for the loss, since my colleagues and myself always have had an active hand in affairs of civic betterment. I, myself, arranged for the treasure to be placed in that particular vault, since everyone was certain it was entirely burglar-proof. It was a vault which, as most of you know, was willed to the city by one of my late business associates.

"But Dr. Ling, here, a foremost authority on Eastern arts, appraised the collection at a value of eight millions of dollars, in company with our own experts. I am still willing to go through with the agreement at that figure. But we are not paying the money to any secret society of thugs who cover their nefarious activities under the cloak of a comic opera name. How do we know we would ever get the collection back from them, for one thing?"

Dr. Ling spoke up then, nodding his wise head.

"Mr. Belmont is right. While the treasure is indeed worth two millions more under more favorable conditions, I advised the sale at the other figure in view of China's pressing need."

Belmont shot him a look tinged with irritation. In those few words the banker and the others had been revealed as men eager for a quick two millions in profits.

Thompson, however, nodded his bald head in agreement. He was a hump-shouldered man with discolored false plates of cheap make, and sat with his clammy hands clasped over his round little paunch. He wore cheap hand-me-down suits to save money and was notoriously a miser. He had objected strenuously to the others presenting the jade Buddha to Tony Quinn. Quinn could not see it anyhow, he had argued, so why waste the money it would bring?

"If the city wishes to gamble ten millions to get the treasure back, that's their business," he grumbled. "Anytime they do I'm still willing to go through with the original agreement to pay eight millions for it."

Warner's brow furrowed with anxiety. That meant a big loss to the city should the demands of this Dragon society have to be met. Of course, there would be the insurance, but it would nowhere near cover the two millions extra now demanded, and which would have to be met by the city. The morning newspapers already were howling at his heels like a hungry wolf pack, demanding that the thieves be caught. Two millions meant a great deal to already overburdened taxpayers. City editors were demanding to know a lot of things, especially who had been responsible for the collection being placed in the vault.

So was the mayor who, oddly enough, had not been consulted about its temporary disposal.

Warner had spent two weary hours in the chief city official's office before calling on Quinn. Publicly, the mayor could not countenance the paying of the ransom by Eight Incorporated, but privately he, as well as Commissioner Warner, was hoping that they would be frightened enough by the Dragons' threat to do so.

WALTER DUGRO, the plane manufacturer, had been sitting quietly, taking little part in the conversation. Now he spoke up.

"Well, gentlemen, this unfortunate affair is having repercussions in more ways than one. While it's true that the emergency bills for home defense which have been passed in Washington will soon set my factory to humming, the delay on this order for my new bomber will mean a lot to the employees now not working. Had this affair not come up, I had hoped that a quick approval of the new ship by Colonel Wang would set us to work on orders to a country I admire for defending herself against a ruthless aggressor.

"But we have no proof that, even after any monies are paid to this Dragon society, which professes to have purely patriotic motives, the collection will be returned. I can only hope, however, that a solution will be reached soon. China is desperately in need of those planes, and my laid-off employees could use the work that will take them off Government relief rolls until other factories get into full swing."

They discussed the matter for another three quarters of an hour. Harvey Belmont and the other three members of Eight Incorporated were plainly a bit huffed that their business transaction, with its attendant two to three millions in quick profits, had been so openly discussed with outsiders. Quinn himself merely smiled, taking a passive attitude. His co-members were leaving the matter in Warner's hands, and demanding full police protection until the commissioner could wipe out the menace of the Dragon society and get back the treasure.

Most of the time Paul Chivor said nothing, though occasionally he bent over and conversed in Cantonese with Colonel Wang in a low voice.

Finally, Thompson rose to his feet and reached for his hat where he had placed it on the table.

"I see no reason to waste further time," he said to Commissioner Warner a trifle coldly. "After all, this is your affair. Our position in the matter has been made quite clear. I shall tell the newspapers flatly that we are not paying a single cent to this group of thugs. Good day, gentlemen."

The others rose and went out too, after shaking hands with Quinn who had tried to rise but could not seem to make it. He sat with outstretched hand as each came by. McGrath was purposely last, sticking out his own powerful paw. But instead of taking Quinn's hand, he merely held his own within an inch of it, hoping—as he did hope time after time—that he would get proof that the man he was certain was not blind would forget himself and clasp it.

But Tony Quinn's dead-looking eyes only stared straight ahead.

"Are they all gone, Silk?" be asked his valet.

Commissioner Warner answered from the doorway.

"Not all, Tony. There's still a stubborn jackass Homicide captain standing there hoping you'll see his hand—when he ought to know you're as blind as a bat."

"Yeah, a Black Bat," McGrath said significantly, following his harried superior. He turned in the doorway. "Y'know, Quinn. I'm kind of glad the chief put me on the Chinatown detail. I've got a hunch that's where the Black Bat will show. So long."

Silk closed the door and watched until he was sure that all had gone. Belmont plainly worried that he might be a victim of the Dragon society, was driven away by his Chinese valet under police escort. Police also went with the others.

Then the nearly bald little man who posed as a valet turned to Quinn.

"A little worried about McGrath this time, sir," Silk said. "With him in charge in Chinatown this afternoon he'll give every officer special orders to be on the lookout for the Black Bat."

"I wouldn't worry too much about it, Silk," Quinn said carelessly. "The police know quite well that there's a thousand to one chance of the collection being down there. That's probably the last place it would be taken. By nightfall they'll have all suspects picked up and questioned. It will be reasonably quiet in Chinatown by then—I hope."

"What now, sir?"

"Call in Butch and Carol through the tunnel."

HALF an hour later, the four of them sat together in a locked room. Silk was no longer the obsequious servant. He never was when attending such conferences, but gloried in being one of the Black Bat's trusted confidential allies, He sat comfortably in a big chair, with one of the highballs in which he occasionally indulged within easy reach.

Butch lounged in another chair and watched Quinn like a huge St. Bernard eyeing its master. Carol Baldwin, the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl who had brought back sight to a blind Tony Quinn, lay curled up like a soft young kitten on a nearby divan. Her face was filled with excitement.

"I think this calls for you to make the first move, Butch," Quinn was announcing to the former boxer. "First, I want you to study the pictures of Kasini's mob that I have in my private rogues' gallery. Take them along with you if necessary. Go down to Chinatown this afternoon and play the part of the panhandler around the laundries and cafés. You might possibly be able to spot the laundry truck used to kidnap me, though I doubt it. The lettering was, of course, false; as were the license plates. But even if you don't see it, you may be able to stumble onto something."

"And I?" asked Silk, sipping at his cold drink.

"With two policemen on the grounds, Silk, you'd better stick close to home. But you can get me Dr. Ling's home address. I may decide to call on him. Also get all the information you can on Paul Chivor—when he learned to fly, and all that. I'm not quite sure about him yet. He's a little too suave and quiet. As for you, Carol, you'll be in Chinatown, too—for a rendezvous with Butch and myself. And now for a little surprise."

He reached into a pocket of his smoking jacket and brought forth three little silver whistles. He tossed one each to the three. Carol picked hers up, examined it briefly, then blew experimentally.

No sound came forth, but across the room Quinn put a hand to his ear and rubbed it. Her face brightened instantly.

"Ah! So that's it, Tony? These whistles are pitched too high for the average human ear. I've heard of such things. They say that Doberman pinscher police dogs in service in foreign countries can hear these whistles up to three miles."

He nodded, "Good girl, Carol! You don't read for nothing, do you? Yes, Silk and I have heen experimenting with these whistles for two weeks. During the long months when I couldn't see I had to depend upon my senses of feel, smell and hearing, you know—especially my hearing. I was astounded to find my ears getting sharper and sharper until I've almost the uncanny hearing that is to be found among certain animals. That's why I can hear these whistles.

"I can't hear them as far as a keen-eared animal could, but I have been able to hear them, if repeated often enough, up to a distance of several blocks. It's a little idea of mine in case some of you need help. Your signal will be one blow on your whistle, Carol. Yours will be two blasts, Silk. And, Butch, if you get in a tight spot blow three times and keep on blowing. Conceal them on your persons in such a manner that no ordinary search will reveal them."

For more than an hour, the Black Bat discussed details of the crime which he hoped to solve. As he finished, the telephone rang. Silk answered.

"Just a moment, Commissioner," he murmured, "and I'll connect you with the phone in his bedroom."

Quinn went in and picked up the receiver.

"Tony," Warner's voice called, laughingly. "I didn't take that jade Buddha with me, but left it on the table."

"I'll ask Silk about it, Commissioner. If it's here—"

"No need to ask," came the chuckling reply. "That's why I called you up. Thompson took it. Picked it up under his hat when he left and showed it to me after we got out of the house. He says he feels it his 'duty' to return it to Dr. Ling until the collection is found, in view of recent events. I really couldn't ask the darned miser to return it, so I'm sure you'll understand."

"Quite. Think nothing of it, Commissioner."

Thompson was more of a miser than he had imagined. Quinn was thinking as he hung up, a smile touching his lips. But he was not giving up that jade gift so easily. The Black Bat was going to pay a visit to Dr. Ling's home above his art shop and collect a certain Buddha.

CHAPTER V

Butch Becomes a Panhandler

DOWN in Chinatown Butch moved along the narrow, crooked streets for awhile to get the lay of the land, and then got busy. Fortunately—for the appearance he wished to create in his panhandler role—he had not shaved for a couple of days. That fact, and a touch of dirt that had been smudged into his whiskers gave him a decidedly unwashed appearance. He wore a castoff suit that long ago had seen better days, and a ragged, crumpled cap.

Inside his coat pocket were the pictures he had been studying in Quinn's private "morgue," as such reference collections are called in newspaper offices. The ex-boxer was fully aware of his limited mental capacity and that he could scarcely depend on his unsupported memory, so was taking no chance of muffing such an important mission for the Black Bat.

He walked into an art shop, his homely face and aggressive, underslung jaw making him look more than a mere panhandler. He looked positively frightening.

"Got a nickel for a cuppa cawfee, buddy?" he mumbled to the elderly Chinese proprietor.

The Chinese waved him out.

"Go 'way!" he shouted. "You get out or I call police."

Again and again the same thing happened. Butch was just begininng to congratulate himself on not being forced to beg for a living when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder from behind. He turned and looked into the glowering face of Homicide Captain McGrath, whose aching corns had not improved his acid temper any.

"Beat it," ordered the captain tersely. "We got a city flop-house for you guys. Don't let me catch you around here again or I'll run you in."

Butch mumbled apologetically—and obeyed by heading right around the corner to resume operations. He spotted the Chow Seto Laundry again just as a man got out of a cab up the street and entered the place. Butch recognized Joe Mega easily. The "panhandler" unhesitatingly followed him in.

Mega was talking in a low-voiced tone to a scholarly-looking Chinese wearing shell-rimmed glasses. Even Butch's slow-thinking mind had no difficulty in recognizing that Oriental as Chow Seto, whose pictured face was one of the photographs in the former boxer's pocket. On the counter between the gangster was a tin container with a slot cut in its sealed top. Printed on the can were the words:

PLEASE HELP THE CHINESE WOMEN AND
CHILDREN MADE HOMELESS BY THE WAR

As Butch came in, he saw Joe Mega's fingers dropping a bright object into the can. A message of some kind, maybe.

Chow Seto looked up aod saw Butch. It was the second time Butch had been in this place.

"Get out!" screamed the laundry man. "No comee back, I told you all same—"

"What's eating you, Chow?" demanded Mega of the Oriental. "Cut out the pidgin English with—"

Then he saw that the Chinese was talking to someone else and turned.

"Come on—get outa here, ya big ape," Joe Mega growled at Butch.

In his faithful way, Butch, the slow-witted man of direct action. He knew that Joe Mega had been the driver of the laundry truck in which Quinn had been kidnapped, for Quinn had told him so. Mega also had taken his orders from the mysterious leader of the Dragon, who had been present on that death ride.

Therefore, to Butch's single-track mind, Mega had dropped into the container a note meant for the Dragon Master.

Butch acted automatically. He stepped half to one side and forward as Mega's hand went beneath his coat, and let drive with a right hook that had carried him high in the heavyweight division. His iron-knuckled fist smacked against the mobster's swarthy jaw and Mega fell like a pole-axed ox. Butch snatched up the can containing the message.

BUT he had not counted on Chow Seto. Like a streak of light the slender Chinese snatched up a small replica of an old-fashioned bung starter from beneath the counter. His brown hand lashed out and the weapon caught Butch alongside the head. The can fell and went rolling across the floor as Butch crumpled on top of Mega. Chow Seto leaped nimbly over the counter, jabbering in Cantonese to two other Chinese in back.

He rolled Butch aside and got Joe Mega to his feet. The mobster was cursing savagely,

"I'll get the police—have him locked up for assault," said the Chinese. "Hold him here until I return."

"Don't be a damned idiot!" snapped Mega. "They might take a fool notion to search this place, like they've combed most of the other joints around here. I'll just beat this bum up and throw him out into the ... For the love of Mike! Look there on the floor, Chow!"

He grunted expressively as he pointed to several objects that had dropped from Butch O'Leary's pockets as the Black Bat's emissary had fallen.

He bent swiftly, then straightened up with several rogues' gallery photos of Duke Kasini, some of his men, and some snapshots of several Chinese. Joe Mega's lips tightened menacingly as he studied the pictures.

"1 get it," he said at last, glowering down at Butch. "The law says the cops can't search a place without a warrant. So they sent this big dumb-looking bird around as a bum. Come on, help me lift him in back before somebody sees him."

"Do you think he's a Federal man snooping around?" demanded the Chinese as they carried the recumbent ex-boxer into the back room. Into his almond eyes behind the spectacles had come a look of uneasiness. "Ever since we lost that big shipment off the tanker I've been half expecting something like this. Those Federals never give up, Joe, don't forget."

"Well, you can't forget that," growled the burly gangster. "He's only a flattie and he won't be a live one long. We're in the clear. Stop beefing. I'm banking nobody saw him come in here. They don't send men around on the tails of their own men."

Joe Mega let Butch O'Leary's legs drop heavily, then straightened up, looking at Chow Seto.

"1 just brought you another customer," he said. "That was what I dropped in the can. The bellhop working for us over at the Lamont Hotel lined him up. Here, lift up that trap-door. We'll shove this bum down ... "

In the meantime, Tony Quinn waited impatiently until darkness, then slipped out through the tunnel to the gatehousc back of his home, leaving the two unsuspecting patrolmen on guard about the grounds and Silk Norton near the telephone. He got in the coupé that the ex-boxer had parked for him some distance away, and drove to Chinatown. At a street corner not too well lighted he parked and got out, strolling around with his hat brim pulled low over his eyes for a look at Dr. Ling's art shop and the living quarters above it.

When he reached the place, he noticed that a pretty Chinese girl of eighteen or nineteen had crossed toward the shop from the other side of the street. He noticed something else, too. Flash Mega was tailing her. The gangster appeared to be interested in a window display, but he was not taking his eyes from that girl.

The Black Bat turned swiftly and got back to the corner without attracting undue attention. There was a fire-escape overhead. He leaped, caught the bottom and pulled himself up. Slipping up four flights of the narrow iron steps of the fire-escape he came out on the roofs above Chinatown. From the shadow of a chimney he looked over the edge of the building into the street. Apparently, the girl had disappeared inside the red stone building, for Flash Mega was following boldly.

Tony Quinn slipped out of his coat and put on the Black Bat outfit which, because of its construction, could be folded into a small, flat package and carried in a cleverly concealed pocket. He patted the two .38s into place under the ribbed and scalloped wings, then like a flitting shadow he cat-footed across until he came to Dr. Ling's roof. To his vast relief there was a skylight that afforded an entrance, thus not necessitating a swing over the edge of the roof for a try at a window.

HE raised the skylight, ears cocked, then slipped noiselessly into a room on the fourth floor. Apparently, the art curator, Dr. Ling, was quite well off, for the room appeared to be the quarters of two or three servants. None were here now, however.

Down another flight of carpeted steps the Black Bat made his way to the third floor. No sounds of life here, either, and from this vantage point he could have heard voices from below. Perhaps Mega had not followed the girl inside after all, or had already been sent packing.

Then to the Black Bat's keen ears there came sounds from the pad of feet up the stairs toward where he crouched in the curtained hallway.

He melted back against the wall, looking about him. There was a door behind him and he tested the knob, his eyes on the stairs below. A Chinese woman servant was coming up. The Black Bat's hand twisted the knob and it turned without difficulty. He eased himself into a bedroom—a woman's bedroom judging from the faint perfume in the air.

The Black Bat waited, half expecting someone outside to turn the knob. But the servant passed on by and ascended the last flight to her own quarters on the top floor under the skylight. The Black Bat waited a couple of minutes to make sure.

He opened the door a trifle, and this time he heard voices below. One voice apparently was that of the young Chinese girl he had seen on the street. She spoke in well-modulated tones and in them was the iciness of a frozen mountain stream.

"What do you mean by coming to this house?" the Bat heard her demand of someone. Flash Mega, in all probability.

"Take it easy, I-tso," came the cracksman's roughly persuasive voice. "It ain't every doll I bother to follow home. How's about you and me for tonight, baby? You know, some Chinese eats, and—"

"Get out!"

But the gangster did not get out. He must have come boldly toward the girl for she started swiftly up the stairs. Flash Mega's heavy tread pounded after her.

"Get out, I tell you," she ordered again, though there was a touch of fear in her voice now. Flash was coming right on up.

"If you don't get out of here, I'll call the police," she said for the last time, and the fear in her voice was undisguised now.

The Black Bat looked hurriedly about him. That this bedroom was hers, and that she meant to take sanctuary from the gangster here he had no doubt. He looked about him again for a place of concealment for himself, but saw nothing promising. The heavy drapes about the walls would not hide him, once the lights were turned on.

Quickly, the Black Bat crossed over in the darkness, loosened the bulbs from the two lights, then melted behind the drapes as the door opened. The girl tried to slam it shut but Flash Mega's foot caught it. He chuckled in the darkness when she snapped the switch and nothing happened.

"Listen, baby, you're gonna be nice to me when I try to date you up from now on," he said, a hint of threat in his voice. "It would be too bad if your father found out his precious daughter was a member of the Dragon society, wouldn't it?"

"I give you one more chance to go," I-tso said coldly to the mobster whose grin could be seen in the dim light of the hall. "I knew it was a mistake to enlist the help of such as you in our cause. Unless you go at once the Dragon Master will hear of this."

Flash Mega's answer was to push her into the room. He grabbed her by both arms and his voice grew ugly. He was living up fully to his reputation for surliness now.

"Nobody gives a damn about your Dragon Master," he said sneeringly. "That's got nothing to do with you and me. If it hadn't been for me that museum vault never woulda been opened. There wasn't another mobster on Earth who coulda cracked that—"

"That will do, Dragon!"

FLASH MEGA drew in his breath with a rasping sound and whirled toward the door. How that green-robed figure in the dragon mask had got there he could not guess. But the figure was there just the same. The man in the green robe pointed a longnailed finger in Flash Mega's face.

"You fool!" the Dragon Master accused thunderously, "You stupid, thick-witted fool! You dare endanger our cause by a silly infatuation for one who is a thousand times too good for your kind? To disobey me means death—the same kind of death that was dealt out to one of the evil eight tonight at dusk."

The Black Bat looked at that weird figure in the dragon mask and long, green silk robes. So he had made good the threat that had been made in the note, despite police protection for the eight? Was it Belmont he meant? He was the most likely. Had Ohmo somehow slipped through the cordon of police around Belmont's guarded mansion and dealt out death?

The Bat detected an undercurrent of murderous rage in Flash Mega's next words, though he apparently was trying to placate the Dragon Master.

"Honest, Boss—I mean Master—I was only kiddin' the dame—"

"Silence! I came here to see if Dr. Ling was in, hoping he might go to the remaining evil ones and persuade them to save themselves by paying the ransom. There soon will be only six, for another is about to die."

"Who?" whispered the cracksman softly.

"Harrison. He ought to slip out of town tonight in a plane flown by Paul Chivor. The plane will take off, yes. But neither Harrison nor his foolish pilot will arrive at the Harrison country estate alive. But that is not all. Harvey Belmont also must be taught a lesson."

The Black Bat's eyes narrowed, So Belmont had not been the first victim of the Dragon society. Who, then?

From beneath his green robes the dragon-masked man took a sealed envelope. He handed it to the mobster who slipped it inside his coat, as the Dragon Master, apparently through with his chiding for the time being, gave some low-voiced, hurried instructions.

The Chinese girl had gone over to the shaded light beside her bed, fumbled at the bulb and discovered it to be loose. She screwed it tight again. The Black Bat knew then that he was about to be discovered.

He had hoped that things would turn out differently. It had been his intention to find out all he could, then leap across the room in the darkness and snatch the weird green mask from the Dragon Master's face. Now he waited, his hands on the .38s.

"In this envelope are sealed orders for one whose name is written," the Dragon Master was saying to Flash Mega. "I had intended sending them by another. But it is just as well. You will be interested because it concerns your friend, ex-District Attorney Quinn. We'll see if we can't complete the job this time. Now go."

It was at that moment that I-tso Ling managed to click on the light. And it was at that moment that a voice from across the room said quietly:

"Gentlemen, stand fast!"

Flash Mega's hand was still under his armpit where he had placed the letter in an inner coat pocket. It came up with a gun as a startled cry burst from his thick lips.

"The Black Bat!"

Then gun thunder drowned out the sound of his voice.

CHAPTER VI

Dr. Ling's Daughter

SNAPPING reports of the Black Bat's twin 38s filled the room, the sound mingling with the Chinese girl's scream. The gangster had jerked his own gun free, but the stream of slugs sent his way ripped it from his hand. The Black Bat could easily have killed the younger Mega. The mobster deserved killing. He was a thug without a spark of mercy in his heart and had been a party to the cold-blooded murder of an elderly watchman. Of that, the Black Bat was sure, even if Flash had not been the actual murderer himself—which the Nemesis of the underworld knew was a possibility.

But the Black Bat did not want to kill Flash Mega. He preferred to incapacitate the mobster and make him talk. Moreover, he wanted him out of the way now while he jerked the dragon head mask from that weird figure in green and took him prisoner.

The Black Bat had not counted on any interference from the girl. But as his deadly shots sent Flash Mega's gun spinning I-tso flung herself straight at the man in black, with arms outspread. Behind her the Dragon Master moved fast, diving through the door, with Flash Mega on his heels.

"Run, Master!" screamed I-tso Ling, throwing her arms around the man whose appearance always sent terror through those members of the underworld who had the misfortune to meet him.The Black Bat flung her aside and leaped for the door to follow his quarry. Flash, however, showed lightning presence of mind. Before the Black Bat could reach the door, he heard the click of a key in the lock. Running feet pounded down the stairs, The Black Bat was locked in—with a pretty Chinese girl—unable to pursue the wily head of the Dragon society and his henchman.

He sheathed his guns and looked at I-tso. She stood with her back to the wall, arms outspread, and now that her impulsive protective movement to save the Dragon Master was over, a fear she could not fight down began to show itself in her soft, almond-shaped eyes. She shrank back from the man who so much resembled a huge black bat.

"What are you going to do with me?" she whispered huskily.

"You should be turned across a knee first, I think," he answered sternly. "You have just allowed one murderer, probably two, to escape."

"What right have you to talk?" she demanded with sudden spirit. "Why do you try to thwart a just cause?"

"I deal out justice, instead of working against it," he told her, coming a step nearer. "This Dragon Master is not a patriot. Patriots do not hire gangsters. Who is he?"

"I don't know," she whispered in a low voice. "No one knows. He has a way of changing his real voice."

From outside the door came the sound of the hurried patter of footsteps coming down the stairs from the upper floor, and the servant's shrill voice came in Cantonese. I-tso answered back. The sound of the running footsteps receded toward the shop below.

"I told her to bring the police," I-tso said. "They must have heard those shots anyhow."

The Black Bat paid no attention.

"Who is the Dragon Master," he repeated sternly. "Your father?"

"No—no, I swear he isn't!" she cried, a note of hysteria in her voice.

"How did he get in here?"

"I don't know, I didn't know he was here until he spoke. Perhaps he told the truth. Perhaps he did come to see my father, who left the shop a little while ago at closing time."

To the Black Bat's question about where the treasure had been taken she shook her head.

"I think the Dragon Master himself took it away," was all she said.

"Where a patriotic cause is concerned, no man commits ruthless murder as this man has done," he told her firmly. "And he intends to commit more. Such a man would not hesitate to take your own life once the money has been paid. You are being duped—if you will only realize it."

From down below where the servant had unlocked the shop door came voices. Police were entering. A voice the Black Bat recognized was bellowing down there. McGrath's! The Black Bat grinned to himself and raised the window.

HE went back, clicked off the light, and his hands caught the Chinese girl by the shoulders.

"Until this Dragon society is broken up, you and I must be enemies, I-tso Ling," he said firmly. "But if you'll help me I promise that once the treasure is returned, the full amount of its value will be used for the purpose intended."

And with that he was gone through the window to the roof above. He wanted to plant the seeds of distrust of the Dragon Master and his cohorts in this girl and in any others he could. Through that he might find a chink in the masked leader's armor and thwart his murderous scheme. But he had to work fast. Already one man was dead, according to the Dragon Master, two more were slated to die in a death plan within the hour, and there was to be another attempt on his own life this night—or at least on the life of blind Tony Quinn, former district attorney.

The Black Bat was grinning broadly as he climbed the fire-escape to the roof. He had an idea what would happen in that Chinese girl's bedroom as soon as he left. And, as if the Black Bat had the gift of second sight, as well as his actual double sight, things were happening there exactly as he visioned.

I-tso Ling turned on the lights as feet pounded up the stairs. McGrath, followed by two other police officers, unlocked the door and yanked it open. He gave a start at sight of the Chinese girl there alone.

"Where is he?" he roared.

"Who?" she countered innocently.

"Don't hand me that!" snapped the captain. "You know blamed well who, young lady. The Black Bat!" He barged in past her, looking sharply around. Then he glowered at her. "Go look in the mirror!" he commanded sternly.

She went to the mirror and looked. Squarely in the center of her smooth forehead was the insignia of the Black Bat, a tiny black bat with outspread ribbed wings. She removed it and turned, McGrath was looking out of the window.

"What was he doing here?" he snapped at her.

"I don't know," she confessed honestly. "But I do know that I'm glad he came. A—man—followed me into the house."

She made no mention of the Dragon Master, but the seeds of suspicion that the Bat had sown were beginning to bear fruit....

Reaching the roof unseen in the dim light, the Black Bat melted into the shadows like a fleeting ghost, thankful that the soles of his specially made shoes were as soft as felt and made not a sound. In the lee of the chimney again he changed into his light topcoat with the specially constructed pockets to conceal his Black Bat outfit, then hurried to the street by way of the fire-escape. The change had taken but a short time, less than five minutes having elapsed since he had left I-tso Ling's home. Yet hardly had he started toward the corner when a taxi shot out of an alley a short distance behind him.

The Black Bat instinctively darted into a doorway, hands near his guns. He suppressed a start of surprise at sight of Dr. Ling's daughter and a man she evidently had hastened from the back of the house to meet. The bespectacled Chinese was Colonel Wang!

Rounding the corner then, the Black Bat walked quickly toward the heart of Chinatown for his rendezvous with Carol Baldwin. No one noticed the man with the wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes, at least giving him no more than a casual glance. Least of all Captain McGrath who had barged out of Dr. Ling's house, flagged a passing cruiser, and was piling in beside the two husky police officers.

"To Tony Quinn's house and step on it," the Black Bat heard him order. "The only way he'll beat me there this time is to fly."

A young Chinese school boy of about two, in rumpled cap, short-sleeved shirt, and knee breeches came down the street with a bundle of papers under one arm. The youngster waved a paper at the Black Bat.

"Wuxtry! Wuxtry! Read all about it! Big Banker knocked off in his office by the Dragon mob! Wuxtry!"

THE Black Bat bought the proffered paper and by the light of a street lamp saw Thompson's picture on the front page. The miserly financier, working late in his big office as was his custom, had been throttled in the washroom while his chauffeur and two uniformed policemen waited outside his locked door to take him home. There had been not a sound of a struggle from within, but finally the chauffeur, growing uneasy, had summoned a guard to unlock the door. Thompson had been found on the floor of the washroom with his neck horribly twisted. A jade Buddha that was known to have been in his possession had been missing.

The killer—Commissioner Warner. in giving the story to the newshounds had made no mention of Ohmo—had made his entrance and exit through a forced window, despite the fact that it was three stories above the ground.

It wasn't hard to visualize what had happened. The deformed Chinese thug probably had been driven in one of Chow Seto's closed laundry trucks to an alley somewhere nearby. Most likely Ohmo had made his way unseen across rooftops, like a huge monkey, to the top of the squat stone building housing the offices of Belmont and his associates. In the gathering dusk, he had climbed down like a human fly, opened and wriggled through the window into the washroom. There, he evidently had crept upon Thompson from behind and broken the financier's neck with a few wrenches of those monstrous hands with their iron strength.

"I wonder if Ohmo took the Buddha with him, as the commissioner seemed to think, or whether Thompson already had sent it to Dr. Ling's house?" muttered the Black Bat, as he tossed the paper into a trash container.

He hurried across the street to a cigar store on the corner and quickly located the office telephone number of the Dugro plant factory. There was no answer, and he tried the man's house. Somebody had to warn Dugro of what was about to happen to that plane. But again the Black Bat got no answer.

"I'll have to go myself," he said under his breath. "I can get there about as quickly as McGrath can. Besides, I'll have to detour McGrath elsewhere."

He dialed again and got Commissioner Warner on the wire.

"Greetings, Commissioner." he said, smiling to himself. "This is the Black Bat. I've just missed renewing my friendship with my old friend McGrath in the house of Dr. Ling. The Dragon Master was there, in green robes and a dragon mask. So was Flash Mega, one of Duke Kasini's men, and a cracksman extraordinary if there ever was one—as you know. I regret to say that both, escaped, but I believe that's a clue to the looted museum vault, though I've heard that McGrath also had an idea Flash was involved, but somehow managed to wriggle out of the net of suspicion."

"Where's McGrath now?" barked the gray-haired police veteran.

The Black Bat chuckled. "In view of his hasty departure in a police cruiser I rather imagine he's speeding toward the house of former District Attorney Anthony Quinn. I would advise, however, that you call him by radio and detour him to Belmont's home. In giving orders to Flash Mega, this Dragon Master mentioned something about the financier being 'taught a lesson,' Good night. Commisioner."

He hurried out to another phone, not daring to risk Warner tracing the call. He had made no mention of the threat upon his own life, preferring to keep as many police away from his home as possible. Those two on guard were more than a source of worry already.

HE dialed a third time and almost immediately Silk Norton's familiar voice answered. Quickly he told Silk what had happened and that McGrath undoubtedly would show up there sooner or later. He also told of the new death threat to himself.

"I'm hurrying to the airport, Silk," he said. "I'll call or come home as soon as possible. If McGrath shows up, stall him somehow."

"I'll do my best, sir. Commissioner Warner called a little while ago. My imitation of your voice worked quite well. He's been checking up on certain men. What he found out about Paul Chivor coincides with what an aviator friend told me a few minutes ago over long distance from California. Chivor's reputation as a pilot is hardly spotless, sir. His regular transport pilot license was taken away from him out there quite a number of months ago for stunting a plane while drunk. He went to China but was prevented by the consul from enlisting for military service in a foreign army. I believed he stayed intoxicated most of the time. A sort of black sheep, as I understand it. My friend even had reports he was hitting the junk."

"Good heavena, Silk! Anything more?"

"Yes, sir. Chivor might possibly have met Duke Kasini while in China. At least word was circulated among the flying fraternity that he hung around the hotels in Nanking and Hankow where the opium dealers gathered, mooching drinks, until he finally wheedled himself into a job with the Chinese Government as some sort of aviation adviser. Then according to what Commissioner Warner told me, believing he was talking to you, Chivor came over with Colonel Wang with the treasure as a sort of assistant to help supervise packing and shipping the military planes back to China. Also to act as interpreter. Since then he's stayed in his hotel most of the time, drinking."

"And now he's flying Harrison out of town to his country estate in a plane that has been marked for destruction by the Dragon Master, Silk," the Black Bat said grimly. "I'm on my way."

He hung up and slid out into the night again. Carol was waiting at the place he had told her he would park the coupé. Something in her lovely face told him she had bad news. She showed him a copy of the paper.

“I know,” he said, nodding. “Carol, Harrison is taking off for his private estate up state shortly in a plane flown by Paul Chivor. He’s trying to slip away from this Dragon gang but is only hastening his death. The ship has been turned into some kind of death trap.”

“You’re going out there now?” Carol asked anxiously.

“As quickly as possible. You meet me here when I return. Try to contact Butch in the meantime, as we all agreed.”

“He wasn’t there, Tony!” Carol cried sharply. “Oh. I’m so afraid something has happened to him!”

“We’ll have to chance it for the moment,” the Black Bat said, shaking his head. “At least until I get this present important matter attended to. The place I’m going to is only two miles out, and I’ll be back almost at once. I’ve got to talk to Chivor. Perhaps he can help us.”

CHAPTER VII

Butch Meets the Duke

BACK in a low cellar somewhere in the rabbit warrens of Chinatown, Butch O’Leary regained consciousness under a deluge of cold water thrown in his face a second time. He blinked his eyes and opened them as the slender Chinese laundryman who had slammed him put down the pail.

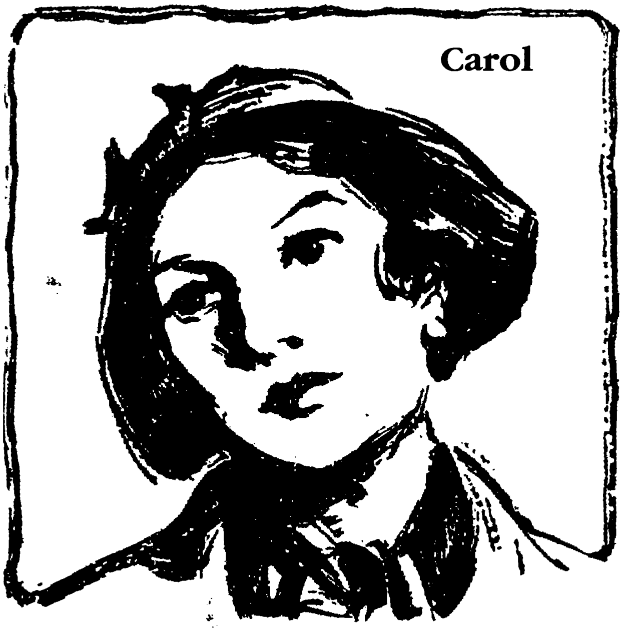
Big Butch’s head was aching terribly. There was a peculiar smell in the air that was foreign to him, but Butch judged from the appearance of the place it was some kind of an underground storeroom. Nearly a dozen gangsters were crowded in the place with the Chinese, who seemed to be in charge.

“Feeling better, my hulking friend?” inquired the Oriental, sarcastically, solicitously.

He came closer to test the bonds that held the powerful prisoner in a straight-backed chair that had wooden arm rests.

“I feel like hell, and I’m not your friend, you slant-eyed hunk of chop suey,” growled Butch. At least he could still give vent to his feelings. “And if I ever get loose I’m gonna crack that dome of yours so hard they’ll think it’s an earthquake in Hong Kong.”

“You aren’t going to get loose,” was the bland reply. “But your funeral shall be worthy of one of your station. A cement coffin to preserve you in the water for years to come, a nice new laundry wagon for a hearse, a dozen men here to act as mourners, and flowers of a wondrous kind—poppies.”



Joe Mega came over and looked down at the victim of Chow Seto’s blow with the wooden mallet. Mega’s own jaw was still aching from the sledgehammer blow that had knocked him cold. His open palm lashed out and caught the helpless Butch a terrific slap on the cheek, leaving livid fingerprints on the dirty skin.

“Who sent you down here, flattie?” he growled angrily,

“Go to the devill” mumbled Butch, fighting the hardest battle of his life to keep calm. It was easy to realize what had happened, when he remembered the pictures they must have found on him. He had blundered! But they would get no information from him.

Joe Mega changed his tactics abruptly. In an effort to be cunning he let a genial smile break the lines of his surly face. He reached out and patted Butch gently on top of his shaved head.

“Now look, pal,” he began wheedlingly, stroking Butch’s bullet-shaped dome with the palm of his hand. “I’m a softie at heart when you get down to it. I wouldn’t hurt a fly, see? Why, I even go out into the country once in a while to Chow Seto’s brother’s farm just to watch the birds and the bees, because I got a sentimental streak in me. But you take a guy like Duke now—the feller I work fur. He ain’t got none of them finer sentiments in him like I have.

“Why, pal, I’ve seen him stick slivers whittled from a match under a guy’s fingernails and then set ’em afire when the guy already had spilled, just to listen to him yell. He’ll be here pretty soon, too. Why don’tcha just tell old Joe a few things before the boss comes in?”

Butch told him plenty—all of which concerned Mr. Mega’s ancestors snd where they undoubtedly had gone after the demise. He also suggested that Mr. Mega could go there.

"And you won't need your winter underwear either," the ex-boxer finished belligerently.

The ring of mobsters roared with laughter at Joe's expense, and so did the Chinese.

But Mega stepped back, his swarthy face contorted with rage. The temper he had made such a valiant effort to control had snapped. With a snarl he yanked out his gun and flipped the barrel into his hand for a handle. Butch braced himself for a brutal beating about the head and face by a gun butt, but he was stubbornly determined that it would not make him open up. What difference would one more beating make anyhow? He was probably doomed already. Unless—

The door opened abruptly and a man came in from some underground passage, moving with the effortless ease of a black panther. He wore an expensive blue suit, dark shirt and a straw hat set at a rakish angle on his slick, greased-down black hair. He caught sight of the prisoner the instant he entered the room, saw what was about to happen.

"Hold it, Joe," he ordered sharply. "Where'd you get him? Who is he?"

JOE MEGA grunted an explanation, pointing to several pictures on the table which the new arrival went over to examine.

"He had 'em on him," Joe Mega said. "Maybe Chow Seto was right. Maybe this guy is a Fed after all."

"Well, we'll soon find out," answered the mob leader seating himself on the edge of the table with a leg draped over it.

He straightened the crease in his trousers, took out a gold-plated nail file and began to manicure his long, carefully polished fingernails. Carefully he looked over the pictures, each of which had the Rogues' Gallery number attached. The candid photograph of himself was a wide contrast to the man sitting on the table.

Finally, he leaned forward toward the immobile prisoner. His voice was gentle but his eyes were those of a tiger.

"You're gonna talk, brother," he informed, "whatever and whoever you are. Before I get through with you you'll beg me to let you spill. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by doing it now. What were you doing snooping in Chow's place?"

"My socks were dirty," growled Butch. "I wanted him to wash 'em."

DUKE KASINI—for the dark-haired man was the notorious mob leader—sighed and rose from the table, slipping the gold-plated nail file into his pocket.

"Blackie," he ordered one of his men, "you and Manni lash his hands palm down to the arms of the chair where he can't move 'em, Sharpen ten matcbes about an inch long to shove under his nails one at a time. When we start lighting the heads he'll talk."

Butch felt the cold sweat break out and begin to bead on his upper lip. He did not fear the devil himself, and he knew he would die before uttering a word that would endanger the cause of Tony Quinn, but this match business was a little hard to stomach. There would he plenty of pain before he lost consciousness.

But he refused to let himself be frightened into a panic.

He threw his weight backward and the chair tipped. It hit the floor with a crash and rolled over against several burlap bundles from which that strange odor exuded. Butch's face came close to several tins with Chinese writing on them, and one had been opened. That was why the odor was so strong, and Butch knew enough to realize that the stuff was opium, from which heroin and other drugs were made. What he was staring at right now meant that the information District Attorney Anthony Quinn had been given by a couple of convicted mobsters about Duke Kasini was true. This looked like the gangster's storeroom for his contraband. But what could Butch O'Leary do about that now?

The two gangsters who had been called Manni and Blackie hauled him upright again, cursing, and shoved the chair nearer the table. While they untied one arm at a time and struggled to lash his palms down flat on the wooden arm rest, Joe Mega methodically began sharpening matches to sliver points about an inch from the beaded tip.

Then from somewhere outside there came the sound of feet hurrying along a passage. Flash Mega, followed by Chow Seto's two partners, came in. His swarthy face was a trifle paler than usual.

"I just come from the Dragon Master in Dr. Ling's house, Duke," he panted, shoving an envelope at the sleek mobster. "He said give you this... And, Duke—the Black Bat was there!"

All talking and other noise suddenly ceased as Flash Mega babbled his story of the hooded Nemesis who invariably appeared when a new crime wave struck the city. Gunmen looked at each other nervously. This meant more than simply dodging the police now. The Black Bat did not follow the rules laid down for the legally appointed minions of law and order. He made his own rules, for there was no reason for him to have to abide by legal red tape. Worst of all, everybody knew he could see in darkness as well as in day.

"That's not the worst of it either," put in one of the Chinese, his almond-shaped eyes showing his uneasiness. "I just heard a short-wave broadcast. for we've been tuned in on all police calls since last night. The order has gone out to round up Duke Kasini and every one of his mob for questioning!"

KASINI showed remarkable coolness. He knew what that meant, and it was an old story to him. It had happened again and again in his life.

He had been reading the note brought by Flash Mega, and now a slight sneer crossed his thin lips.

"Take it easy, you dopes!" he said coolly. "Don't we always get pulled in when something breaks? Haven't we always got our iron-clad alibis fixed up in advance? Let 'em pull us in. They've picked up about five hundred guys all over town today. Now cut out playing old women and listen."

He took a match from his pocket, snapped his thumbnail to the head and let the flame lick at the envelope held between the fingers of his other hand. He dropped the burning note to the floor, then looked his men over, one by one. A hard grin crossed his handsome face.

"Belmont has just been snatched!" he told them. "The Dragon Master sent Ohmo right in after him when the Chinese valet squawked and brought the cops running. Some of us are to go over and pick up Belmont now. Then we're to go after Tony Quinn again, as a warning to the others—all that are left. They'll pay up soon."

"You or even that monkey man couldn't get within two blocks of Quinn's house now," Flash Mega said positively. "Why, the whole place will be crawlin' with cops!"

"Personally I hope they are there," answered the mob leader, with a shrug. "And at Belmont's, too. You guys didn't think we rung in with this Dragon outfit only because of a cut on that collection, did you?"

"Meaning what, Duke?" asked Blackie softly.

"Brighten up, Blackie. Every cop in town will be over in that district tonight. I knew they would be when this Dragon business broke. I figured it that way from the start. It's our chance to settle a little business with Old Whiskers—or the Feds who work for him—and grabbed that load of junk off the tanker. Come on!"

CHAPTER VIII

Death Plane

ONCE out of the heavier city traffic, the Black Bat made good time toward the airport. It lay less than two miles out beyond the city limits in a broad field. Just off the highway. Here, too, squatted the low, serrated buildings of Walter Dugro's plane factory. Once the field had been a municipal airport until increased traffic had necessitated a move to a larger one. Now it served merely as a test field for Dugro's planes and a few privately hangared jobs.

There were few lights about the place, except dim ones in Dugro's factory, which was not yet running night shifts for Government contracts in the new emergency program. From somewhere outside of the factory came the sound of an idling airplane motor in the night. That, the Black Bat thought swiftly, would be the plane that Chivor would pilot, taking Harrison to his country estate. The Black Bat must reach them before that plane took off!

He leaped from his car and hurried toward a high wire fence that surrounded the plant, looking this way and that along the deserted stretch of buildings. There was no sign of life, though two or three parked cars were down near some darkened sheds. Probably one of these belonged to the watchman, and possibly another was the car of Paul Chivor who had unsuspectingly come out to fly a plane to his death.

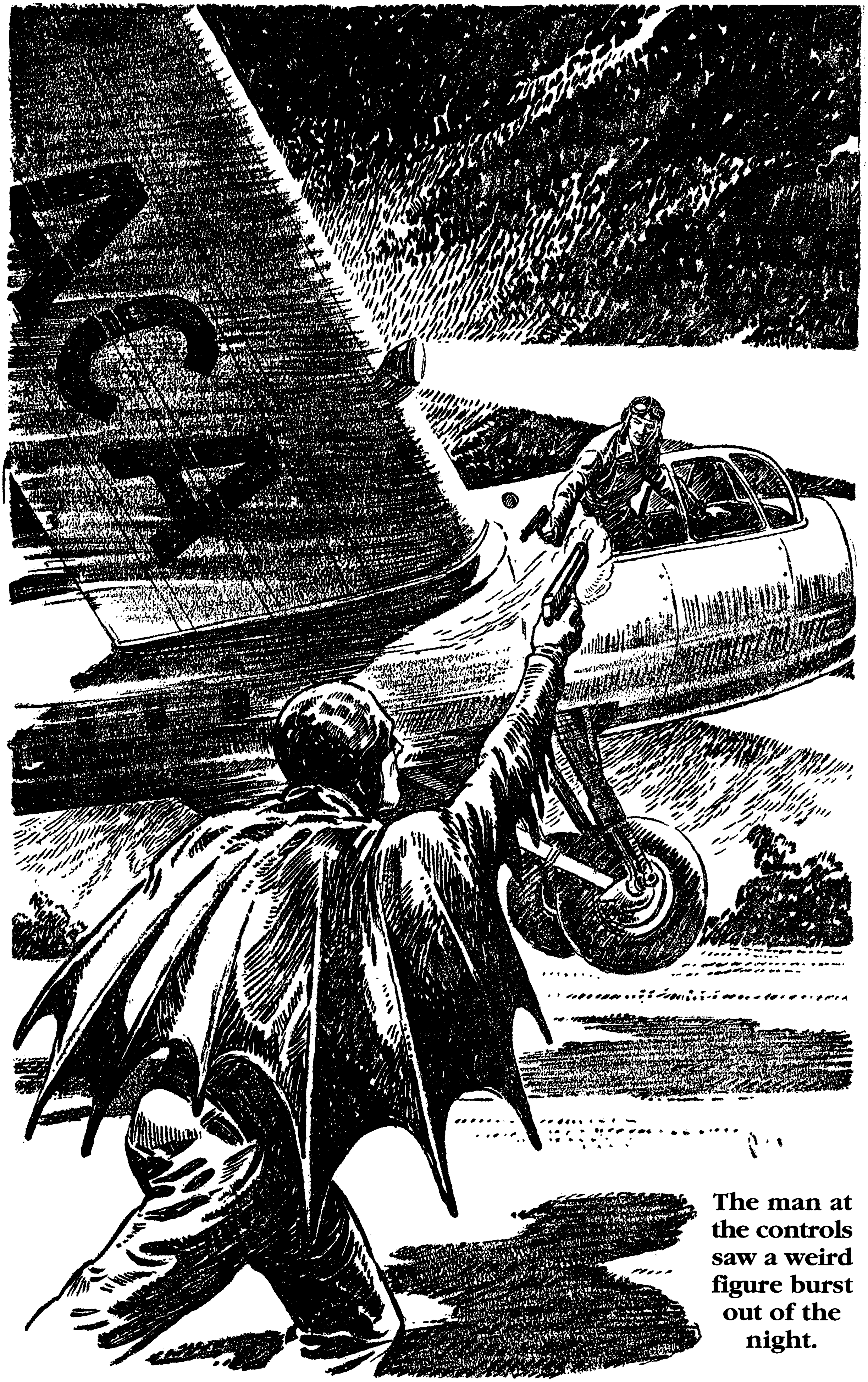
The Black Bat tested the fence and found that it had not been charged. He had hardly believed it would be. Since the Dugro factory was not yet actively engaged in building Dugro's new bomber for the Government. Then the Black Bat's lithe muscles carried him up and over the fence. He dropped lightly to the ground and at a swift, noiseless trot set off for the corner of the building.

Out front the plane motor was still idling. He rounded the corner and came onto the edge of the tarmac. A door in one of the Dugro buildings was open and it was from this that the plane evidently had been rolled before being warmed up. Now as the Black Bat paused suddenly, to ponder his next move, he saw a movement in the pilot's compartment of the high-winged cabin monoplane. A man's head was outlined for a moment—then the idling motor suddenly broke into stronger life

With a roar of power, it spun around on one wheel and taxied off down the side of the field toward the end of the runway to turn around for the takeoff. The Black Bat leaped from his hiding place and tore out after the trundling plane. For fifty yards he raced it through the darkness, its twin landing lights throwing long fingers ahead on the darkened airport.

The man at the controls saw a weird figure burst out of the night and come in under the bobbing wing. A startled cry broke from him. His hand came up and jabbed out through the window. Flame lanced from it. Above the roar of his motor came the sharper, snapping reports of an automatic pistol. But the Black Bat had seen him and had ducked aside, his cry of warning drowned out.

Then the ship spun around on one wheel into the



The man at the controls saw a weird figure burst out of the night.

runway, the powerful motor burst into full life, and under its eighteen hundred revolutions per minute the sleek, high-winged monoplane went skimming down the oiled runway and rose gracefully.

The Black Bat could only stand helplessly panting, and watch there in the darkness below. The plane was circling for a safe altitude before heading off cross country. It was now a thousand feet directly above the field. The twin landing lights set in the leading edge of the wing had been shut off.

Picking up two small objects his night-trained eyes discerned lying on the ground, the Black Bat promptly forgot them as a new thought flashed through his brain. The radio! That plane might have a radio. He set out at a run for the open door through which the plane had been rolled. He reached the edge of the building again and hurried along. The lights on the edge of the roof, shining down on the tarmac, blinked out and a uniformed watchman began rolling the door shut.

THE man gave a startled cry as a weird figure in a black hood and winglike appurtenances under its arms sppeared in the opening.

"Quiet!" commanded the Black Bat, his automatic out and covering the watchman, "I mean no harm. On the contrary, I'm trying to save two lives. I tried to telephone here to warn them. but got no answer."

"The office is at the other end of the building," the watchman said, swallowing hard. "There is no—"

"Never mind. Has that plane that just took off got a radio?"

"Y-yes, sir," gasped the man, still badly frightened. "But it's been out of commission the last few days. They been meaning to have it fixed, but haven't got around to it."

"But there must be some way to get in touch with it! There's got to be! That plane is a deathtrap, man! The pilot must be warned!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but there is no way I know of. You say there is something wrong with the ship?"

"More than wrong. You've heard of the Dragon Master who killed the financier Thompson in his office only a short time ago this evening? Well, that passenger being flown away is Harrison Thompson's associate, and Harrison has also been doomed to die. Something is going to happen to him and to Chivor, his pilot!"

The watchman's face blanched with horror as he stared at the Black Bat.

"My God, sir, this is terrible!" he cried. "Mr. Chivor is not flying that plane! Mr. Dugro himself is at the controls!"

It was the Black Bat's turn to stare. He grabbed the man by the shoulders and shook him,

"Are you sure?"

The watchman nodded vigorously.

"Yes, sir, I just talked to him."

"Where's that Chivor fellow, the pilot who was supposed to fly Harrison?"

"I think you'd better come with me, sir," suggested the frightened man, hurrying back through the building.

The Black Bat followed him. They went into the huge interior, through a big sliding door of sheet metal, and into a big hangarlike room with an office at the back. A shiny new twin-engined light bomber stood before the door, its three-bladed metal props glinting dully from the dim lights overhead. This was the job that Colonel Wang had been testing recently. The published reports were that it would do better than three hundred miles an hour.

"Wait a minute," the Black Bat snapped sharply, leaping to the plane and looking inside the sleek fuselage toward the two pilots' seats. "Is this thing ready to fly?"

"Why—yes, sir."

"Then come on!" cried the Black Bat and hurried the man on toward the office. "Maybe it isn't too late, if Chivor is still here, Maybe we can catch them! It's worth a try."

The watchman, however, merely stepped inside the office and pointed to the swivel chair back of a battered desk.

"There you are, sir," he announced disgustedly.

Paul Chivor lay sleeping soundly in the chair, his long legs and scuffed flying boots outspread on the desk top. He lay slumped back in the chair, reeking with the smell of whisky. His head hung to one side and saliva drooled from a corner of his mouth. He was snoring loudly, his good-looking face anything but handsome now.

"He came in about a half an hour ago—reeling," the watchman explained to the Black Bat. "I've never seen any man with so much in him and still able to keep his feet. He made me help him wheel out Mr. Dugro's plane, but wouldn't tell me what he was going to do. He kept mumbling something about it being a secret. I managed to slip away while he was warming the motor and telephoned Mr. Dugro on the shop phone.

"He said there wasn't time to get another pilot, so he jumped in his car and came right out. By that time Mr. Harrison had arrived. So Mr. Dugro flew him himself. He—he was going to spend the night at Mr. Harrison's country estate and fly back in the morning in time for Colonel Wang's final tests on the new bomber."

THE Black Bat shrugged. He could do little else. Once again the man in the green robe had made good his insidious threats. The Black Bat grabbed

Paul Chivor and began to shake him. Chivor gave a strangled snore and opened his eyes.

"Uh-agh-w-what is it?" be mumbled, "Get up!" commanded the man in black shaking him again.

"Go 'way!" mumbled the pilot sleepily, pushing at the hands on his shoulders. "Don' wanna get up. Wanna go to sleep."

The Black Bat turned to the watchman and asked if he had any coffee. The man quickly unsnapped his lunch pail and brought out a black thermos bottle. He unscrewed the cap, poured it full and handed it to the hooded man. Five minutes later Chivor was sitting weakly in the chair, blinking his eyes and sipping the last of the coffee. He was sobering up now, the sight of the grim, hooded figure above him helping to bring him around.

"Who the devil are you?" he finally grunted suspiciously.

"The Black Bat," was the grim reply. "Tonight you were supposed to fly Harrison to his estate up country a hundred miles or so. Why—"

"Well, what of it?" Chivor snapped testily. "I stopped in at a cocktail bar on the way out and took on a couple too many. I can fly better when I'm high than when I'm cold sober, any day. But Dugro came out here to the field, cursed me for getting blotto, so I came in the office here for a nap."

Ths Black Bat told him then what had happened, and that Dugro was now flying a death plane. Chivor's face turned dark with anger and resentment.

"What am I supposed to do—weep about it?" he snarled. "It's my neck I saved. If I hadn't have got crocked, where do you think I'd be in the morning?"

There was truth in that, and nothing to be gained by further questions. The Black Bat stepped from the office and vanished. It took him only moments to slip out of his Black Bat outfit, stow it safely in its special pocket and start his car. But all the way back to town he was frowning thoughtfully.

"That man was not as blotto as he pretended to be," the Black Bat concluded. "I saw a flicker of surprise in his eyes when I first shook him, and the coffee brought him out of it a little too quickly."

As soon as he got back to town, he telephonsd Silk Norton. He asked about McGrath.

"No, sir, McGrath hasn't put in an appearance yet," Silk informed, "but I've some bad news that just came over the radio. Dugro's plane exploded in the air about five miles south of town. The tail is believed to have been blown off by a small time bomb. Harrison was found dead in the wreckage beside the highway when two state troopers dashed up right after it spun into the ground."

"But Walter Dugro himself was flying that death trap plane, Silk. What happened to him?"

"He jumped, sir, after vainly trying to get Mr. Harrison to. But it seems that Mr. Harrison was too frozen with fear. According to the newscast, Mr. Dugro crashed down through the limbs of a tree and was injured. The two state troopers who saw the plane crash beside the highway phoned for a police ambulance."

THE Black Bat could see how clever it had been. Harrison had told his associates that he was being sneaked out of town in Dugro's private plane. Somehow the Dragon Master had found out about it and had contrived to have a small time bomb placed in the tail of the plane, set to explode right after the take-off.

Who besides the dead man's associates knew about it? Only two men of whom the Black Bat could think—Paul Chivor and Colonel Wang. The bespectacled Cbinese who had accompanied the collection to America had been at Dugro's factory for days testing out the new twin-engined fighter, and quite naturally would have been in a position to know what was happening.

And now the time bomb had exploded, the plane had crashed in what ordinarily might have looked like an accident, Harrison had been killed and Dugro had been badly injured.

"Silk," the Black Bat said to his eagerly listening valet, "do you think you could get through a police guard that's been placed about Harvey Belmont's home, and open his private safe? Just a hunch I'm playing."

"I should be glad to try both, sir. As you know, I've been studying the science of—er—safes for some time. But what about Captain McGrath? Suppose he should show up here while I'm gone?"

"I've been thinking of that, Silk. Now listen carefully. I'll get hold of Carol and send her to you in the coupé. You meet her in the tunnel beneath the gatehouse with your makeup kit and a nurse's outfit you'll find in the closet. Make a nurse of her. She'll then arrive at my house in the regular way and explain to the two policemen on guard that I'm having a restless night and that she has come to relieve you. If McGrath shows up, she'll positively refuse to let him disturb me. As soon as she arrives you let her in, then explain to the officers you're leaving her in charge and that you're going for a long walk, to try to shake off the effects of a hard night."

"I quite understand, sir. What am I to look for on my—er—walk?"

"I'll try to meet you. If not, see if there is a record of stock lists, or of various companies Belmont has a hand in.

"I certainly would have less reason to suspect a man of being the Dragon Master if a stock list showed his millions to be anything but paper millions. I don't suspect Belmont particularly, but he is still alive, and I have to take every possibility into consideration. We simply can't afford to overlook any bets."

The Black Bat found Carol on the street corner where she had agreed to meet him. Her face showed undeniable anxiety. She came hastily to meet him, placing a hand on his arm.

"Tony, I'm frightened about Butch," she told him, low-voiced. "He didn't meet me here, Furthermore, I saw two men I'm positive were Kasini mobsters come out of the Chow Laundry around the corner with bundles under their arms. Perhaps it really was their laundry they were taking home, but they went into a ramshackle hotel next door. Tony, I think they've got Butch!"

CHAPTER IX

Chinese Laundry

QUINN went with Carol back to the coupé. He got in and sat down, leaving the door open.

"Silk is expecting you, darling," he told her, and repeated what he had already told Silk. That was a habit with the Black Bat, in order to impress his instructions. "You're to hurry to Silk at once. He'll meet you in the tunnel beneath the gatehouse with his makeup kit. He'll also have a nurse's outfit taken from the closet where we keep such things. You're to put it on and then come to the house the front way, through the police guard. Explain that I'm having a restless night and you've come to relieve Silk.

"McGrath will undoubtedly show up. When he does, you're to refuse him admittance to my bedroom absolutely, on the grounds that the patient can't be disturbed."

He started to get out to leave her, but again she touched his arm.

"Please be careful, Tony," she said, low-voiced. "And—haven't you forgotten something?"

He bent swiftly, kissed her, then got from the car and faded into the night. He hurried through a dark alley, cut across a brighter lighted street, worked his way through the crowd until he rounded the corner and came to Chow Seto's Laundry.

The front door was locked and the place dark. The Black Bat, now in ordinary guise, went on to the corner and came in through the alley. In pitch darkness that was almost like day to his bat eyes, he slipped from his light topcoat—and donned the Black Bat outfit. A hundred alley smells and sounds out of the night penetrated his keen senses as he leaped over a high board fence and came into the back yard of Chow Seto's place of business. He recognized it by the narrow gate where the laundry delivery trucks backed up to the rear door.

The Black Bat inspected the back windows, found them latched from within. No chance of entrance there unless he broke the pane. He replaced the thin steel tool he had taken from a scalloped rib of his bat outfit, brought forth a handful of keys, some of which were paper thin.

He inserted key after key in the lock of the door next. When he found the right one, he sprung it and pushed—only to find a bar across the door from within.

Because the window, though latched, was not barred, however, the Black Bat guessed that someone was in the place night and day. Either that, or the very fact that the place was easy to enter might be a clever blind.

The Black Bat looked swiftly about him. He went to a nearby trash barrel and brought out a discarded newspaper, soaking it at a dripping hydrant at the back of the ramshackle building, He pasted the sheets of paper to the window pane near the top. The dampness made them cling enough so that when the Black Bat pushed gently the pane gave way with but a faint tinkle. He reached through the hole, unlatched the window and slid through.

His night-trained eyes already had taken in the room before entering. It was an ordinary back room such as might be found in any Chinese laundry. There was a gas plate, a table on which food could be served, and a bunk in one corner. Shirts by the hundreds hung everywhere on drying lines in both the back room and the larger one up front.

Ths Black Bat ducked under the flapping laundry and began exploring the front room. A peculiar smell came to his nostrils—one that he quickly recognized. He ignored it while hurriedly exploring the place, a .38 automatic in one hand. After all, it was not so unusual to pick up the odor of opium in a Chinese place like this. There were probably a hundred or more pipes near here, being smoked this minute by addicts of the poppy.

His eyes at once located the cleverly hidden trap-door in the back and he opened it up. A flight of narrow steps led down about eight feet into a cellar that was empty except for a few broken and discarded canned goods boxes. The concrete floor gave off no sound and the cracked walls were bare.

FINDING nothing in the cellar, he went back upstairs again, grimly thoughtful. That particular odor was still strong, and suddenly it gave him an idea. Many other things were done with opium except smoking it in pipes, in its crudest form.

In a corner of the front room of the establishment were dozens of packages of laundry tied neatly and ready for delivery. The Black Bat went over there and brought a package down from the shelf, and the string made a loud popping sound as it broke under his fingers. He pulled aside the wrapping paper.

The bundle contained half a dozen ordinary white shirts, ironed and folded neatly as only a Chinaman could do it. But unfolding one and shaking it, the Black Bat made a discovery. Several wafer-thin packages fell out of the collars and cuffs and the front pocket yielded more. Dope! Whether it was heroin, morphine, codeine, cocaine or other derivatives of opium, the Black Bat could not tell from the looks, but all were equally contraband.

The Bat went through a couple of other packages of laundry. More paper envelopes. More white powders.

"So that's the connection?" the hooded man mumbled under his breath, a bit startled himself as the enormity of the scheme began to unfold itself.

Whatever these powders were they were derived from the alkaloid substance of opium. Opium smuggled in by Duke Kasini beyond any doubt!

The Black Bat's unerring diligence had at last uocovered the distributing plant of one of the biggest retail dope rings in the country!

He had started to replace the packages on the shelf when two things happened almost simultaneously. From behind him through the trap-door from which he had just emerged himself came a movement, and from somewhere below in that same empty cellar there came blast after blast on the high-pitched whistle he had given Butch.

The Black Bat wheeled with the speed of a startled cat and was already falling to the floor when he saw the Chinese beneath the raised trap-door pointing a gun at hm. His own .38 exploded and the Oriental's gun went flying. He made a dive forward at the Chinese who ducked back down the steep steps.

The Black Bat came in on top of him almost head first, and together he and the Oriental he recognized on the instant as one of Chow Seto's partners crashed into the empty cellar. A startled yell came from the Chinese who had been behind the Black Bat's attacker.

Flame spurts lashed out in the cellar as the door thumped shut and one Chinese began screaming orders in Cantonese, The Black Bat's dive to one side in the darkness caused him to stumble over a box underfoot, though he could see plainly. The clatter made him a perfect target from less than five feet.

He saw a gun swing up, and his own snapping .38s gave back a death-laden answer. A stream of slugs poured into the Chinese dope peddler. He dropped in his tracks, but the other partner had leaped in from the side with a long-bladed knife in his hand. He thought, of course, that that grim, hooded figure could not see, and that error in judgment proved fatal.

THE Black Bat disliked to kill at any time, even in self-defense or in defense of his helpmates, but there was no choice now. And he also knew the misery and human suffering put upon the world by these dealers who had waxed rich through the terrible hold they had upon their victims. Sanitariums were filled with such victims trying to fight their way back to normalcy or some semblance of real living. So he shot the knifeman three times and then it was quiet in the cellar.

"Butch!" he called, searching the place for signs of a door. "Butch!"

There was no answer. Not in Butch's voice—but that whistle was still blowing blast after blast in the agreed signals from somewhere back of those four walls. The sound, pitched too high for an ordinary human ear, was coming from nearby.

Then the Black Bat noticed the place where he had stumbled over and knocked aside the box, with a resultant racket that might have been his undoing. Beneath it, barely discernible even in daylight probably, was something that looked like the head of a ten-penny nail. The Black Bat's foot pressed down on it. Almost at once a block of the concrete wall swung in. What he had thought, when examining the place, were cracks in the cement, actually were the cunningly concealed outlines of a secret door.

A short, narrow passage ran back about twenty feet to another door. The whistle blasts were coming from beyond it, and the Black Bat's hands slipped fresh clips into his automatics as he darted back.

He did not even hesitate. His muscular shoulder hit the wooden door and it gave in under the impact. He almost fell into a low, cellar-like room. Butch was alone and presented a startling sight. The massive-necked former boxer had been tied in an ordinary wooden chair but it no longer resembled one. He stood erect on his bound feet, the remains of the broken wood hanging from him in splinters.

"BOSS!" Butch cried. "I knew you would come—I knew it!"

He grinned delightedly, crow-hopping around on his tightly lashed feet.

"Boy, am I glad to see you!"

"Here, let me get at those bonds," ordered the Black Bat. "We've got to get out of here in a hurry. Someone might have heard those shots."

"Where's those two Chinese pals of that Chow Seto guy?" demanded the prisoner belligerently, flexing his muscles. "I'm gonna knock some heads together."

He looked disappointed when the Black Bat told him that they were beyond caring whether or not their heads were knocked together.

'Lucky for them," grunted Butch. "Say, they was workin' in with Duke Kasini, Boss. He left them here to watch me while he took his gang and went out to do some jobs."

Quickly, he related all he had overheard and finished with the information that the banker, Harvey Belmont, had been kidnapped, The Black Bat nodded.

"I expected something like that," he said. "The Dragon Master said in Ling's house that Belmont needed a lesson. I have a feeling though, Butch, that they're going to be very careful not to hurt him. If Harvey Belmont really is the richest of the group who were to buy the treasure—as he's supposed to be—this Dragon Master is far too cunning to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. It's good psychology they're using, too. If Belmont is frightened enough, and sees that his partners are being killed, one by one, he'll put his life before his money. He'll pay up eventually . . . How did you get loose?"

Butch grinned and unconsciously flexed his iron muscles again.

"They were getting ready to give me the works with lighted matches shoved under the fingernails. They thought I was a Fed, or something, looking for junk. But you know what them dopes did, Boss? They had already untied my hands from my sides and lashed 'em to the arm of that chair. But when this guy with the diamonds came in with some more orders from the Dragon Master they left those two Chinese to watch me and hit out.

"Pretty soon these two Chinese dope sellers hear a noise on a buzzer they got rigged up and they hit out. That was you upstairs, of course. Anyhow, being left alone a minute was all I needed. I gave one good heave and split off them chair arms like they were dried match sticks. The whistle was in the cuff of my sleeve so I started blowing while I rolled around and busted that chair to pieces. I didn't know if it was you upstairs, but I had a kind of hunch it was, and I was sure hoping so."

The Black Bat made a hurried inspection of the place.

"Think of the set-up, Butch," he pointed out. "Kasini smuggled in the stuff from China via Mexican or other ports, and this Chow Seto and his two partners probably picked it up in dirty laundry some way. From here the stuff went out to victims all over the city."

They hurried out through the door again, anxious to get away from this place, but sirens already were wailing to a stop in front of the laundry. They were likely to be trapped!

"Quick, Butch—out the back way," ordered the Black Bat. "Head for home. Hurry, before they come around. Someone must have heard, and turned in an alarm as soon as that first shot was fired!"

He jumped quickly up the steps and cautiously raised the door an inch.

Butch crowded behind him, stumbling in the Stygian blackness. But already flashlights were playing out front, and there were the sounds of more police as other cruisers jerked to a stop outside.

"Hurry, Butch!" the Black Bat repeated. "It will take them a minute or two to find their way up that dark alley—they can't make it in the cruisers—and we must beat them to it! We've got to be gone before they get there."

Even as he spoke in a hoarse whisper he was leaping through the hidden entrance in the cellar wall he had found, and up the steps to the laundry, closely followed by the massive-necked Butch. Hidden by the lines of drying shirts, they cat-footed to the rear room where the Black Bat had left the window raised.

The next instant they were cautiously emerging through the window in the alley where the Black Bat hastened away in one direction and Butch scuttled away in another.

Hidden by a high board fence a safe distance away, the Black Bat quickly shed his black, hooded garb. With his soft hat pulled down shieldingly low he slipped into the street where he found a passing cab, ordering the driver to an address on Pine Street.

After a time he got out at the address given, one in the middle of a block of residences. He waited until the taxi's tail-light had vanished back in the direction of Chinatown, then walked up the street. Three blocks away lay the smart home of Harvey Belmont.

On the next block over, the Black Bat cut in between two houses. But the man who emerged only moments later was an entirely different one. He had become a hooded black shadow.

From the back of the Belmont grounds the Black Bat leaped over a hedge into the shadow of an arbor. Only one patrolman was in sight, but even that alert bluecoat never realized that a flitting shadow passed within fifteen feet of him. The Black Bat went in through a cellar window, climbed a flight of stairs to a large kitchen and paused. Only silence greeted his keenly-listening ears.

On noiseless feet he moved into the dining room, then on into a living room beyond. A quick search disclosed no wall safe, unless one were hidden back of a sliding panel. Still as silently as a shadow he moved on into a luxurious library. Here, above an open fireplace, a panel had been slid back. The safe door was cracked partly open. The Black Bat smiled grimly behind his mask. And the smile became a wide grin when his keen eyes caught the outline of a shoe behind a heavy chair in a corner.

"All right, Silk, you can come out." he whispered, chuckling softly through the darkness.

CHAPTER X

Mystery Explosion

GRINNING, Silk Norton rose from behind the chair. He looked the part of a typical yegg in felt-soled shoes and rumpled suit. He came across the room to the Black Bat, carrying his tool kit.

"Oh, so it's you, sir," Silk whispered, "I'd just got the safe door open when I knew someone was in the house who had no business here. I can't say I heard anybody—it was more like I felt somebody had come in.

"I was pretty certain it was you, but when a man is doing a job like this he mustn't take chances."

Silk was taken completely by surprise at the news that Belmont had been kidnapped. Finding that no one was here when he had arrived himself, he had thought that perhaps the financier had changed his mind and gone to confer with the others of Eight Incorporated, since they now had such vital matters to confer about.

"I couldn't listen in very much on the radio," he explained, "so I haven't been able to keep up with everything that's been going on. One of the two officers on guard at our place insisted on being in the house most of the time. I kind of suspect it had something to do with personal orders from Captain McGrath, though the sandwiches and coffee might have been a contributing factor. Never have I seen such appetites! No wonder I was forced to stay in the kitchen a good deal of the time."

Silk had not taken anything from the opened safe as yet, and now the Black Bat began to sift the papers he saw there, not just certain of what he would find or what he might learn, He only knew that from Harvey Belmont's suite of offices in the squat building where his associate Thompson had been throttled, that the banking genius spun a financial web that spread all over the country, in various corporations.

The Black Bat soon found ample proof of how wide-spread was Belmont's money schemes. The financier kept a sort of record of various holding companies, bonding companies, insurance utilities, and a list of stocks of other companies in his home safe, probably copies of others in his offices.

Only two of the list were of more than passing interest to the Black Bat. One notation showed that he owned the controlling stock in the Dugro Aircraft Company. Another memorandum proved the financier to have been the sole owner of the Asiation Import and Export company of California.

"Here's an odd one, Silk," Quinn whispered to the little valet. "Asiation Import and Export. I've never heard of such a name!"

"Sounds rather unusual, sir," Silk commented.

"A combination of Asiatic and Aviation, I imagine. No—wait a minute. Silk! It's coming back to me now. When the revolution first broke out in Spain, there was a scramble on to buy up good used airplanes suitable for military service. They were sold to the Loyalists as well as to Franco, and some of the outfits like this one got into trouble with the State Department. I recall this one now in particular. Hmm! Our friend Belmont certainly has his fingers in a lot of pies, but he must have lost a pile of money before he got out of this one." Abruptly the Black Bat paused and went rigid, his restraining hand on Silk's arm. Then he heard it again. Footsteps were creeping through the dining room. He motioned for Silk to replace the contents of the safe and close it. Gun in hand, the Black Bat slipped like a wraith to the door and stood watching as a shadowy figure came into the living room. It moved over to the window, saw the patrolling officer on duty there, unconscious that anything amiss was going on in the house he was guarding, then the wraith crept on toward the library.

It was at that moment that the Black Bat's voice whispered pleasantly from nearby.

"Good evening, Miss Ling. Visiting?"

THE girl gave a stifled gasp and turned to face the weird figure in the hood—the same she had met in her own bedroom earlier in the evening.

"So we meet again," said the Black Bat, coming closer to her. "And still enemies, I'm sorry to say. What are you doing, may I ask?"

"I've been hiding and waiting a chance to get away unseen," she answered.

"That's not a direct answer, I fear, though it sounds frank enough. You should know by now that my interest is China's interest insofar as this stolen art collection is concerned. Why did you come here? Who sent you? Your murderous Master?"

She shook her head, knowing he could see in the darkness.

"No. He did not send me. But you heard him say in my father's house why he had come there—to get him to act as an intermediary for the others. After he left—"

"—out the back way presumably, you hurried out and joined Colonel Wang," the Black Bat finished.

A startled look came over I-tso's oval-shaped face. She tried to peer through the darkness into this man's hooded face, even coming a bit closer. The fear his appearance usually aroused in others was completely lacking.

"You know everything, don't you?" she whispered.

"No indeed, but enough to know that immediately after the Dragon Master disappeared from your father's house you left also, and rode away in a cab with the colonel. Why?"

"You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you," she answered quietly.

"I'd like to, I-tso Ling. But up to now you've given me little reason to do so. You're a Dragon and helped the murderous leader of that blackmailing crew to escape. He was in your house. That means that quite possibly your own father or Colonel Wang was present."

"No—no!" she cried in a strained whisper. "I swear that isn't true, they couldn't be. You see, since I met Wang a short time ago we have—well, we've come to mean much to each other. But my father wants me to stay here in America. He's violently opposed to my marrying someone else and going back to live in China when he—he already has another man picked out as my husband. I've been meeting the colonel secretly. That's what he was doing tonight—waiting for me."

"Where did you go then?"

"We rode around a bit, talking over our personal affairs, and I finally came here—after I left him."

"But at his suggestion, possibly. Naturally he's anxious for the ten million to be paid."

"Of course he is. After all, put yourself in his position. He came over with the treasure and may be held responsible by his superiors upon his return. I—I had to do something! So I came here to see Mr. Belmont and beg him to accede to the Dragon Master's demands tomorrow. But no—no!—Colonel Wang knows nothing of that. When I slipped in here, though, there was an uproar out front. Mr. Belmont had been kidnapped from what I overheard them say. Mr. Belmont's valet—he is a Dragon, too—had sounded an alarm and drawn the officers to the front of the house. By the time it was over, Ohmo had Mr. Belmont and was away. The valet fled, too, and joined Ohmo. I had just come in, unnoticed, and found myself unable to leave. I've been hiding here ever since, trying to get away unseen."

Instinctively the Black Bat knew the girl was telling the truth. Had she known of the orders to kidnap the financier she would have had no reason for coming here at this particular time. And she appeared to be entirely frank. Under his questioning she told of how the Dragon society had been organized three weeks previously by the man who wore the green robes and the green dragon's mask, and that none of them knew who he was. She had been horrified by the murders, and no one had seen the art collection since the robbery. It had vanished.

AFTER talking to her awhile, the Black Bat was certain that I-tso definitely was on his side now. With her as an ally he might be able to recover the treasure. He asked her to help him.

"It will mean death for me if I'm found out, but I'll do it," I-tso Ling told him unhesitatingly. "And I promise not to tell the colonel or my father. I think there will be another meeting of the Dragon society tomorrow night in the hidden cellar deep beneath those condemned buildings. I will be there—and do all I can."

There was nothing more to do but let the girl slip away and let Silk follow without her having been aware that the little valet had been hiding in the library. The Black Bat took I-tso to the back of the house, pausing at the door.

"Wait here until the police officer reaches the front of the house," he instructed. "Then hurry away. Find out what you can about this man who calls himself the Dragon Master."

"How can I get in touch with you?" she whispered.

The face beneath the hood broke into a smile.

"You can't. The Black Bat has no friends or confidants. But I'll get in touch with you. We'll meet again— so don't lock your skylight."

His method of letting her and Silk slip away was simple. He went to the front of the house and slipped out through a window. He chuckled at the look of surprise on the face of the officer when he found himself covered by the Black Bat's guns.

Presently there came to the Black Bat's ears two blasts from Silk's whistle—blasts that the patrolling police officer could not possibly hear—informing the hooded man that Silk Norton was safely away from Harvey Belmont's deserted mansion. The Black Bat left the officer with his back turned, backed away under the trees and then disappeared. He found Silk waiting and the two of them hurried toward the estate of Tony Quinn, not many blocks away.

"It's been quite an evening, sir," ventured the little valet, covering his baggy suit with a light topcoat and replacing the cap with a hat. "May I ask what now?"

"We'll go home now," the Black Bat said. "That Dragon Master is a devilishly cunning man, Silk. So far he's made good on every threat he has made. He said one of Eight Incorporated would die within hours—and Thompson was killed in his office. Harrison tried to pull a sneak—and died in the wreckage of the plane taking him to safety, a wreck that almost cost Dugro his life also. Belmont has been kidnapped, and they're out for Tony Quinn's scalp. Maybe there's something doing right now at my house."

HIS words seemed almost prophetic, for when they approached within two blocks of the Tony Quinn estate the Black Bat saw something that happened too fast for words to describe it in the happening. A laundry truck rounded the corner some distance away and paused for not more than five seconds. Its rear doors opened, then slammed shut again. Quickly, then it shot away, and from the direction of Quinn's house there came a heavy explosion!

"Silk, follow that truck!" shouted the Black Bat. "Take that car!" He pointed to the coupé where Carol had left it. "Hurry!"

Silk kept running toward the car and the Black Bat sprinted unseen to the gatehouse. The little valet jumped in, spun the starter, and was off as an alert police cruiser shot around the corner ahead and took out in pursuit of the speeding laundry truck with the police cruiser coming up fast.

The police car gained like a hound on a rabbit, Silk slammed the accelerator to the floor and tried to keep up, cutting across a side street with tires screeching a protest. A couple of minutes later he came out of a side street and caught sight of the laundry truck under the street lights, with the cruiser coming up fast.

But once again the back doors were opened from within, and were closed again almost at once. It was enough. There was a shattering roar, a flash, and what had been a shiny new police car went rolling up over the curb in a mass of shattered steel with two inert things inside that once had been men in blue.

CHAPTER XI

A Blind Man's Nurse

PROBABLY the most disgusted man in the entire city at about the time the sound of the mysterious explosion in Tony Quinn's house went rocking away through the night, was Captain McGrath of Homicide.

McGrath was dazedly picking himself up off the grass outside of Tony Quinn's house with his ears ringing and a few dozen stray stars shooting all through the ozone. Nearby was a hole that looked like a small shell crater.

In a lifetime of police work it had been by far his most disastrous day. It had started with the special afternoon assignment the commissioner had given him in Chinatown. His work had been to direct the efforts of various cruisers and regular officers combing that section, while he himself circulated through the streets with an eye out for suspicious characters. But by late afternoon, when nothing had been uncovered, the hunt had cooled down and most of the cruisers had been directed back to their regular beats.

McGrath had just eased up a bit, keeping a weather eye on Dr. Ling's house because of the little Chinese scholar's connection with the case of the stolen treasure when he had answered a servant's alarm and gone in with two officers to investigate. The first thing that had greeted his eyes when he had opened the bedroom door of Dr. Ling's daughter had been a Black Bat insignia pasted squarely in the center of her forehead.

This had been too much. McGrath was tired and in bad humor. His corns were giving him hell, and to top it all off the Black Bat had shown up and projected himself into the case—and, as usual, had disappeared before the captain could lay hands on him.

So the doughty officer had hurried out, hunted up a police cruiser, and ordered the officers to drive him to Quinn's house. But hardly had he got under way when that personal broadcast to him had come over the police radio, and Commissioner Warner's voice had dripped sarcasm. It had not made it easier for McGrath to know that every radio car in town was tuned in to that sermon and that the policemen occupants of the car were grinning.

That realization had made his ears burn, for his attempts to get the Black Bat were well known to all the men in the department. The fact that he had never yet been able to put the cuffs on the elusive figure brought too much muffled laughter to suit him.

There had been nothing to do but order the two sober-faced radio officers to drive to Harvey Belmont's home. He had arrived just in time to find the place in an uproar over Belmont's kidnapping, and a dazed officer phoning Headquarters to broadcast the alarm that the Dragon Master had struck again.

By then McGrath knew that the Black Bat—if he was Tony Quinn—as the captain so firmly believed—probably was safely at home away from Chinatown. But Captain McGrath was a stubborn man. He had set out to go to Quinn's house, and all hell and high water was not going to stop him. He went, ordering the two officers in the cruiser to stop about two blocks away.

"Stay here until I get bsck," he grunted, as he got out of the car. "Keep an eye out for any suspicious cars cruising around."

He crossed over to the shrubbery. started through, and found a gun barrel squsrely in his face.

"Hands up," ordered the alert officer behind it. "No monkey business."

"Never mind—it's McGrath," trowed the disgruntled detective, though he was secretly pleased at such vigilance on the part of the men he had personally instructed to keep an eye on Quinn. "Just came over for a routine checkup. Anything new?"

The bluecoat sheathed his pistol.

"Quinn hasn't left the house, sir. One of us has been in the kitchen and the other about the grounds all the time. But the pussy-footed valet of his went out. He sent for a nurse to relieve him tonight. She's inside."

McGRATH'S suspicions promptly soared. A nurse, eh? Sure, Quinn had had a bad bump, but not that bad. He no more needed a nurse than McGrath himself did. The officer went to the front door and was admitted by a neat woman in white. She was quite pretty despite her streaked gray hair beneath the perched cap.

"Yes, what is it?" Carol asked crisply—though he could have no idea she was Carol,

He bit off the end of a cigar and looked her over.

"I'm Captain McGrath, of Homicide," he said. "How's Quinn coming along?"

"I gave him a hypo a little while ago," she murmured, "and he's finally dropped off to sleep. He'll be all right in a few days. All he needs is plenty of rest, and not to be disturbed."

"Maybe I'd better take a peek anyhow," suggested the bulldog captain, "You never can tell about those things. There have been threats against his life you know, from the same gang he got away from last night."

"No, no, you mustn't see him," she said firmly, shaking her head. "He can't be disturbed."

"I won't disturb him," said the doughty McGrath, and stalked into the house.

He headed straight for Tony Quinn's bedroom and opened the door enough to peck in. Carol held her breath. But from the bandaged head visible under the edge of the covers there emanated regular snores. In fact, quite loud ones. Butch could sleep any time, anywhere.

McGrath closed the door, his face almost registering disappointment. But the bulldog in him would not let him give up. He eyed the nurse up and down, openly suspicious.

"Say, haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he demanded bluntly. "In a crowd or on the street or something?"

Carol blushed prettily and gave him a coy smile. In doing so she exposed two horrible buck teeth and a whole mouthful of others capped with gold. Her jaws looked like a pawnshop window filled with the stuff. He restrained his instinctive shudder.

"Why, Officer, you're rather old-fashioned in your technique, but then I guess we can't be choosey at our age," she told him, exposing those awful hash pounders again. "I'm off next week, so I could meet you downtown almost any night. We can have a good dinner, take in a show; go to a couple of nightclubs, and—"

McGrath's face changed color. He almost fled from the house and started back to the waiting cruiser, reaching for a match.

The match was never lit, nor was the cigar. From some place nearby the very lawn itself seemed to erupt in a tremendous explosion that knocked him down and sent him rolling. He managed to scramble up, but reeled and fell again, choking on the cigar that had been rammed halfway down his throat. Falling on his face in that way, he had almost swallowed it. He was spitting out the mangled remains and cursing when Donovan and the other officer came running,

"Donovan!" he bellowed. "They threw a bomb or something!"

"Yee-ow!" yelled Donovan. "Look at that hole in the ground!"

The three of them broke into a hurried run to search the grounds, with guns out. From down the street came the wailing of a siren as the two alert officers he had just left in the police cruiser glimpsed the laundry truck nearly three blocks distant from the house and set off in hot pursuit on what was to be their last chase.

McGrath and his men found nothing in their hurried search. The police captain's guess was that someone had sneaked in along the hedge and tried to throw a bomb through one of the French windows. The nurse's white-clad figure was there now, in plain sight. McGrath raced for those windows, but could not guess that Carol went cold all over as the big officer dashed in.

SHE was fighting the hardest battle of her life to keep calm. Always she had dreaded what she feared would be the inevitable day when McGrath would find out the facts about Tony Quinn, that in truth—as the bulldog-minded police officer so keenly surmised—the former district attorney was the elusive Black Bat. Time after time Captain McGrath had missed beating Quinn into the house only by split seconds, but Carol had known that it could not always go on like that. The odds had to fall the other way sometime.

"What happened?" she demanded of him breathlessly, as he barged into the house.

Instinctively, she placed berself between the big officer and the door leading into Tony Quinn's bedroom.

"An explosion!" barked McGrath, "Some rat sneaked up and tossed in a bomb!" His jaw shot out belligerently. "I want to see Quinn, sister—now!"

"You can't," she declared defiantly. "You mustn't! He's had too much of a shock already."

"Out of my way!" he snapped, shoving her aside. "Hey. Quinn!" he bellowed, pushing past Carol who tried vainly to cling to his massive arm.

And then the sweetest sound that Carol ever expected to hear in life came from that sick room. There was a loud clatter, the stumbling fall of a body, and Quinn's voice began calling wildly.

"Silk! Silk! Where are you? What's happened?"

When Captain McGrath burst into the bedroom Quinn, in pajamas, was down on the floor beside his bed, getting to his knees. His dead eyes were staring all about while he fumbled with outstretched hands for some familiar object that would orientate him. In the dim glow of the night light on the medicine table, Carol ran to his side and helped him up.

"Is that you, nurse?" he asked. "Where's my valet? Didn't I hear McGrath's voice?"

"Here, let me help you back into, bed," she said soothingly, straightening the bandage she had fastened so that it fitted like a cap. "Your valet went for a walk, Mr. Quinn. And, yes—Captain McGrath is here."

"What happened, McGrath?" repeated Quinn dazedly. "I had just dozed off when the whole house shook as if there had been an explosion. It almost knocked me out of bed. I tried to get up—I guess I fell—"

McGrath hurriedly explained, then strode into the other room of Quinn's private suite to the telephone. One of the officers came in to report that there had been another explosion some blocks away. The burly detective ordered him to bar all people from coming into the grounds, and dialed Headquarters. Quinn could hear him explaining to Commissioner Warner.

"Oh, Tony, I've never been so frightened as I was when he came through that door!" Carol whispered breathlessly, as she bent over to straighten the covers. "My whole body seemed to turn to ice. How on Earth did you do it? Butch was in that bed asleep only two or three minutes ago."

"I'm under it now," came a muffled voice from below, followed by a strangled sneeze. "And I'm not asleep. That bomb woke me up. He rolled me out just after it went off."

"I had my pajamas on under my clothes, Carol," Quinn told her, in an answering whisper. "I made it here by a split hair. And, Carol, that was no ordinary bomb. Silk and I were a good two blocks from the house when we saw a laundry truck pull up under a street light nearly another block away. All we saw was the back doors open quickly then as quickly close. The explosion came almost instantly, yet the men responsible for it were a good three hundred yards away."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked quickly.

"I want you to get rid of everybody as quickly as possible," was all he could say then, because McGrath came back into the room.

As the big officer entered, Quinn lay flat on his back again with the covers tucked up beneath the chin, around his bandaged head. His dead-looking eyes stared straight up over the foot of the bed.

"I just had Commissioner Warner on the phone," announced the captain, "He's sending more guards to patrol the grounds, though little good it'll do now. They won't come back."

"Is the commissioner coming here?" Quinn asked in a hollow voice.

McGrath shook his head. "He says he can't make it, and for me to take charge. He's having a meeting at Dugro's house tonight. They took Dugro straight there after his accident, instead of to the hospital. Professor Ling and that Wang fellow will be there for tonight's meeting, along with some others. They're going to decide what to do about the ransom."

Quinn would have liked to ask if any word of Belmont had come to the police, but sick and injured Tony Quinn would not know about that kidnapping yet. Carol, however, instinctively guessed that Quinn might want to know the latest developments in the case of the financier.

"Oh, Captain," she said, "I heard over the radio about that horrible kidnapping of Mr. Harvey Belmont by his Chinese valet for the Dragon Master monster. Isn't it terrible? Has there been any word of Mr. Belmont yet?"

McGrath shook his bead, absently reaching for a cigar.

"Not yet. But we'll probably hear soon." He saw the inquiring frown on Quinn's face, and told him the details ot the kidnapping, briefly."Somebody's bound to get word of or from Belmont soon," he repeated. "Probably with a ransom demand of some kind concerning that treasure, for that's the only reason for the snatch. If they'd have wanted to kill Belmont the Chinese could have done it easily."

As he finished, he lighted his stogy. Quinn began coughing weakly when he caught a whiff of the cigar smoke. That was Carol's cue to get McGrath out of the room, which she did with vigor bordering on professional indignation.

"And furthermore," she told the big man as he let himself be shooed out, "I'm locking this door and keeping it locked the rest of the night. Nobody else gets in. If your men must make an investigation of this attempt to murder Mr. Quinn, kindly order them to do so quietly. He's a sick man."

McGrath agreed almost humbly, and went out. Already half a dozen police cars were racing up to the curb beyond the lawn. Uniformed cops were scouring the neighborhood. And it was only a short time before one drawn-faced bluecoat had arrived breathlessly with a story of one thing that had been found. The face of the big Homicide captain was drained white as he listened. His springy step was gone and his bull voice subdued as he went with the bluecoat to the waiting cruiser and got heavily into it.

They drove some blocks down the street to where a curious crowd was being shooed back by several grim-faced police. McGrath got out, forced his way through the crowd and looked down at what was left of the new police cruiser.

The entire engine and front wheels had been blown away and the rest of the car was only twisted steel. McGrath's bulldog jaws clamped down until the muscles in his cheeks stood out like iron lumps as he looked at what was inside. Only minutes before those two mangled things had been men who had driven him to Quinn's house.

"I'll get 'em, Fitz!" came soundlessly from between his clenched teeth. "I swear to you and Murphy that I'll get the hell's spawn who did this if I have to team up with the Black Bat!"

CHAPTER XII

A Raid on Mr. Whiskers

HURRIEDLY Tony Quinn got himself dressed. Except for that small shaded light on the medicine table, his bedroom was dark. As soon as he was ready he called in Carol and Butch and sat on the edge of the bed talking to them. In his hand was a plain metal disk. Butch had managed to grab it from the can with the slotted top before leaving Chow Seto's Laundry, for oddly enough it had been set in place again on the counter after being the object of contention that had almost cost Butch O'Leary his life.

Quinn examined the lettering and numbers stamped on it. They read:

PLEASANT HOTEL, SHANGHAI—
0894-A ROOM 5930

"There's something phony about this," announced Quinn, turning the object over in his hands. "No hotel in Shanghai has nearly six thousand rooms."

"Perhaps it's a code of some kind," suggested Carol, her hand on his shoulder.

'Quite likely. Those last numbers look like telephone listings. We know that Chow Seto retails narcotics, and this may be something that has to do with it."

"Maybe it's some kind of a system like a friend of mine used during Prohibition days," Butch suggested, brightening. "He used tags like the shoe repairman gives you when you leave a pair of shoes to be mended. You know—he tears it in half and writes your name on it beside a number. When you come back after 'em, you got to give him the tag. That's the way my friend worked it. When a customer phoned in, he had to give his name and his number, and it had to check with a file my friend kept beside the telephone. That way no cop could phone for a quart to be delivered and then pinch my friend when he showed up with it."

Quinn chuckled, but his eyes brightened.

"Butch, I believe you've hit it!" he exclaimed. 'Let's take a look at this thing again. Pleasant would mean—"

"Placid," replied Carol promptly. "The telephone number is Placid five-nine-three-o. That's down in the Chinatown district, too."

"Chow Seto's probably." Quinn nodded and sent Butch for the telephone directory. He opened it and thumbed through. "Yes, here it is, Chow Seto Laundry. Placid five-nine-three-o."

"What about the other number then?" put in Butch. "You mean—"

"The other one is the drug user's number. I think it means that a new customer was added to the huge number who get their 'laundry' done at Chow Seto's establishment. His number is o-eight-nine-four-A. Quite simple now that you think of it, yet the average person would never connect the numbers with anything out of the ordinary."

Quinn got to his feet and slipped on his light coat that, with the broad-brimmed black hat he wore, always so effectively served to disguise his features to the casual observer.

"I'm going to Dugro's house to see what I can find out," Quinn told his two aides, again looking through the directory for an address. "Luckily the other car is parked on a side street, instead of being in the garage. Silk has the coupé ... Keep this bedroom door locked, Carol, and don't let even Warner himself come in should he arrive. I rather imagine, though, that at this minute he's with Dugro, waiting for the others to show up."

His final instructions given, Tony Quinn went out through the tunnel and came up under the gatehouse. Police were on guard everywhere and he had to wait for several minutes before emerging through the hidden door.

Crowds were gathered along the streets. The explosion had rattled windows everywhere around and word had spread that another attempt had been made on the life of injured Tony Quinn.

"Must be kinda tough on a guy blind like that and flat on his back, to have them go heaving hand grenades at him," Quinn heard one man remark to another.

"Yeah," was the reply. "It musta been some of the mobs he sent up the river when he was D.A."

"And you don't know know how near right you are, my friend," Quinn muttered under his breath as he passed by.

REACHING the parked car, he set out for Walter Dugro's house, taking a circular route across town to avoid traffic as much as possible. There was always the chance of some slight accident due to some reckless driver, and of a policeman making a routine inquiry, asking to see a driver's license. Blind men were not supposed to have licenses, nor to be driving at all. And Tony Quinn was supposed to be home, injured, and living in a world of blackness.

As he headed the car on a roundabout way along the warehouse district along the waterfront, he saw that the section was deserted. Not even a watchman was in sight.

"I'd better stop off and phone McGrath about Chow Seto's place right away," he decided. "It's possible that the art collection might—"

He broke off with a slow exclamation and slowed down. A hundred yards away in the Stygian blackness between two big warehouses there was a faint glow. But it was not that that attracted the former district attorney's attention so much as did the trucks. Two of them were backed up to an open door—exact replicas of the truck in which he had been kidnapped. And standing on guard at the back of them were two mobsters with machine guns. Others were hurriedly tossing packages into the back of the waiting trucks.

Quinn rolled his car on past, and parked unobtrusively at the curb not far away. Soon a fleeting shadow merged with the deeper ones around the building as a hooded figure with batlike wings under his arms moved toward the trucks.

Then the Black Bat's retentive memory clicked. This building was a warehouse leased by the Government to store certain types of contraband goods seized by customs men until proper disposal was made. It all came back now. For months Narcotics men had been smashing one ring after another in hauls all over the country. In the last raid, in the Black Bat's own city, a quarter of a million dollars' worth of stuff had been seized off a tanker.

It had been discovered that the dope smugglers had concocted a clever scheme. In the guise of plumbers some of them had come aboard carrying long sections of two-inch pipe to replace rusted ones in the ship's hold, Tbe new pipes had been installed, the rusted ones filled with narcotics, the ends plugged, and the smugglers had blandly carried the stuff out past the customs men. The dope had been found—but not the smugglers. Kasini, who had been suspected, had been rounded up and questioned but had had an iron-clad alibi.

"I always thought that confiscated narcotics were given to hospitals," the Black Bat was thinking now. "But Kasini seems to have reason to believe that contraband is in that building. Perhaps his supply is getting short and he's desperate."

The two men with sub-machine guns on guard near the trucks were talking in low tones.

"Did you see anything?" one of them suddenly said uneasily. "I thought I heard something brushin' by me. Sorta slithering."

Already the Black Bst had recognized that speaker, both by face and voice. The man was Manni Torrio, one of Duke Kasini's chief lieutenants.

"You oughta lay off the snow," the other man growled to Manni. "Ever since this Black Bat showed up at old Ling's house the whole mob's been jittery. Even the China boys were showing it when Duke went with them to pick up Belmont."

"I'm plenty jittery," Manni Torrio muttered, shifting his short weapon. "Every cop in town's on the lookout for us since we lifted that art collection. They're foaming over the old duck at the museum getting his head hashed in by Joe. That's a burn for every one of us if we get caught. And now Duke sends us to knock over Old Whiskers' warehouse because he got tipped off his junk the Feds took off the tanker is still in here."

THE Black Bat had awaited his opportunity and had slipped inside.

He paused beside a stack of crates. So it had been "Joe" who had killed the elderly watchman at the museum! That would be Joe Mega, of course.

Over at the other side of the room was a monster safe of a kind the Black Bat had not seen in years. Almost as large as a vault, it stood nearly seven feet high, and presumably had been installed when the ancient red brick building was erected. Now Flash Mega's torch had found it like soft butter. The cracksman had already finished packing up his outfit while others hurriedly carried packages to the trucks.

The Black Bat flitted toward the door again, guns out. Someone caught sight of his moving shadow and cried out a warning as a spurt of fire lashed out. Flash Mega's angry curses at the nervous mobster were drowned out in the snapping reports of the Black Bat's two .38s. The mobster went down and hell broke loose in the warehouse as Manni Torrio opened up with his chopper.

The hail of death sprayed across the warehouse and the Black Bat dropped flat. The spray of .45s sieved a line of holes in the wall across the room. From outside came shouts, orders, curses, and the roar of starting motors.

"You fools!" yelled Mega's rage-filled voice. "Now you've done it, Get outa here quick!"

"It's the Black Bat!" screamed another mobster. "Come on, you guys!"

But for Mega to get out of that door was a problem. The Black Bat had worked his way to a spot where he was under cover himself, and had part of them cut off. Mega was behind the safe, cursing. He made the mistake of exposing a hand carrying the big suitcase containing his oxygen tank and one of the Black Bat's .38s spanged off metal as the bullets ripped holes through leather.

Mega dropped the suitcases and broke for the door as the Black Bat's guns clicked empty. He snatched out the clips and replaced them with loaded ones, but the delay had given the cracksman the brief chance he needed. Under a hail of protecting slugs from Manni Torrio's deadly chopper, Flash Mega made the trucks. Back doors were slammed shut.

From outside came the wail of a siren, followed by a second. The Black Bat looked about for a means of escape back to his car. But the car was nearly a hundred yards away down the street and at about the spot where the police would stop. There wasn't a chance to get back to it and get away without being pursued.

He ran forward through the pitch blackness as the trucks pulled out. But not before he had bent swiftly above three man he had downed, his hands brushing them lightly in the darkness. He wanted to identify his work to the police so there would be no mistakes. He leaped at the right rear fender of the second truck, his own momentum carrying him up on top of the shiny big vehicle. The truck shot out of the gate as two police cruisers came screaming dawn the waterfront, followed by another car. Men leaped from the third car and ran into the warehouse. It was deserted now except for the three dead or wounded men on the floor.

"The Black Bat," one of them, a Federal man, said significantly, as his flashlight played over the insignia pasted in the center of each man's forehead. "And he's certainly making things hot for the Kasini mob, whoever he may really be."

"Yes, but this one is on us, boys," commented another Federal agent.

"We're a little late to close the trap. Through a fluke that wouldn't happen again in a lifetime that mob sprung the trigger and got away without getting caught. Ever since District Attorney Quinn tipped us off two years ago that Kasini was running in narcotics, we've been on his trail. I thought we had him cold this time. Come on, let's see how the police are making out."

THE police were not making out at all, for the luck of some evil god seemed to ride with the drug-running members of the Dragon society that night. On top of the truck doing nearly seventy miles an hour the Black Bat saw the two cruisers coming up like sleek greyhounds. Then as the officers opened up with a fusillade, Manni Torrio opened the back door of the rear truck and poked out the short snout of his sub-machine gun. It burst into snarling flame and a hail of slugs peppered both front tires of the nearest car.

It began to skid wildly, there came a rub-a-dub of deflated tires on the pavement, and the car almost overturned. The second cruiser coming up close behind and trying to get around into the clear, hooked fenders and began to skid sideward also. It swerved wildly with a squall of tires, tried to straighten out, and crashed against the curb with front wheels bent.

By the time the Federal men arrived in their own car, the two trucks had cut through a side street, shot across a main stem, ducked into an alley on the edge of town, then headed out the other direction into the country by a seldom used narrow road.

CHAPTER XIII

Silk Runs Into Trouble

CAUTIOUSLY following the truck that had just brought death to two policemen in their smashed car, Silk Norton was horrified at what he had just witnessed. As he drove with one hand, he took a simple makeup kit from a hidden compartment in the coupé and began to work at his features, using the rear view mirror.

Porcelain caps cleverly, though hurriedly, set in place changed the shape of his jaws. A rubber pad back of his lower lip made it full and protruding. He streaked his hair gray. And a pair of thin glass eyecups did the rest. They changed his pale eyes into snapping black ones.

As he worked, and sped along after the death vehicle, he kept tuned to the police broadcasts on the car radio. tense with dread of what he might hear. For all he knew Quinn's home might be a shambles by now, with Carol and the faithful Butch dead in it. But to his relief he soon found out differently.

Silk shut off the radio when he heard the gratifying news, and sighed his relief. The bomb had missed the house, falling short on the grounds. No one had been injured.

For nearly half an hour Silk followed the truck that was heading boldly back toward Chinatown, The Chinese driver was clever. By devious side streets and dark alleys he drove slowly, taxing Silk's wits to the utmost to trail him unnoticed. Presently when the truck cut around a corner, Silk was faced with the alternative of stopping or boldly following.

He slowed up, and finally drove around the corner into a dimly lit street. But the truck had vanished into thin air!

The little man headed the coupé toward the next corner and pulled up to the curb. Still no sign of his quarry going either direction on the cross street.

Where Silk got out of the car, he was decidedly puzzled. The driver of that truck couldn't have had time to round another corner a block further on. So Silk stuck his hands in his pockets and nonchalantly strolled back the way he had come. Halfway down the street came to an opening so narrow it hardly would admit the passage of a car. It hadn't looked like an alley at a casual glance.

Silk took a look up and down the street, then stepped into the little alley. The narrow space lay between the backs of several high buildings. Above him were the faint outlines of an ancient type fire-escape.

A white card on the wall took his eye and he ventured a quick look from a lighted match cupped in his hands. The placard was that of a house wrecking company. That told him that these buildings had been condemned and were untenanted—were in the hands of wreckers.

For nearly a hundred feet the little valet moved on noiseless felt soles up the narrow alley in darkness that was like black fog. Then, without warning, he came upon the outlines of the truck ahead.

He started to melt into a gaping doorway. Too late he became aware of a movement somewhere close by. He wheeled and tried to duck, but from, out of the night the monster already had leaped. It looked like a bull ape out of the jungle as fingers that were like iron grabbed him by the throat and sank deep, cutting off his wind.

He tried to struggle, flailing his arms in the Thing's steel grasp. But it merely struck him a paralyzing blow that left him half conscious, then tossed him into the truck, where he was covered by Joe Mega's gun. He also recognized the Thing, as Butch had earlier, since Silk Norton also had studied that collection of pictures from Tony Quinn's private Rogues' Gallery.

"CHOW," Joe Mega said, and chuckled, "the monkey man gets better all the time. We could use him in the mob after the Dragon Master gets done with him."

Mega threw the rays of a flashlight into Silk's face for a moment.

"He's pretty runty for a flattie. Maybe he's a Fed. We'll find out all right when we get inside. Now we can make two sing."

"It isn't coincidence that two men were caught prowling after us within the past hours, Joe," said the bespectacled Chinese who was Chow Seto, though Silk did not know that. There was a note of anxiety in the Oriental's voice. "There's something in the wind."

Joe Mega's voice took on an ugly tone. "Sure, there's plenty in the wind. A cut on a two million rake-off from that treasure. You're not going yellow on the mob, are you, Chow?"

The slender laundryman's voice had something dangerously razor-edged in it.

"You know me better than that. I've worked with Duke's mob too long. We were getting along well, just as we have for two years, until this Dragon business came up. I knew it would center the attention of the police on Chinatown and endanger us. But Duke's been getting too confident. It was stupid for him to send the others to raid a Government warehouse to get back a confiscated shipment. That doesn't ring true to me. Who ever heard of Federal men leaving such a cargo in—"

"Forget it," Mega cut in impatiently. "Let's get over to the laundry."

Leaving the deformed Thing who had attacked Silk in the condemned building, Chow drove the truck into the alley behind the laundry and backed up to the rear door. The doors that had opened and spewed out death to two police officers now opened again and Mega ushered Silk Norton out. Silk was bound and gagged with his own necktie and handkerchief. With his wrists behind his back he was taken inside.

Chow Seto had lifted a cleverly concealed trapdoor in the back room ahd descended into the cellar. Silk managed to follow somehow, and Mega came last. On the floor the Chinese suddenly stumbled over something and fell against the wall in the darkness. Mega chuckled but the sound turned into a snarl of hate and fear as he flashed his light on the floor. Lying there with Black Bat insignia on their foreheads were Chow Seto's two partners.

With curses dripping from his lips, the gangster leaped to the other side of the room and pressed the nail head that swung the secret wall section inward. The other room was empty—except for the scattered remnants of a broken chair and Duke Kasini's picture on a table with the insignia of the Black Bat pasted across it.

Chow Seto looked at it and turned to Joe Mega. There was a look of terrible fear in the eyes of the Chinese dope peddler.

"Well, Joe?" he whispered. Joe Mega covered his own shaken feelings with a sneer.

"Don't go off half cocked."

Chow Seto shrugged and picked up a five-gallon can of gasoline that was in a corner. Then the disguised Silk saw the murderous look that came into Joe Mega's cruel eyes as the gangster's gun came up, pointing squarely at the back of the Chinese. Silk could not even cry out because of the gag that had been shoved into his mouth.

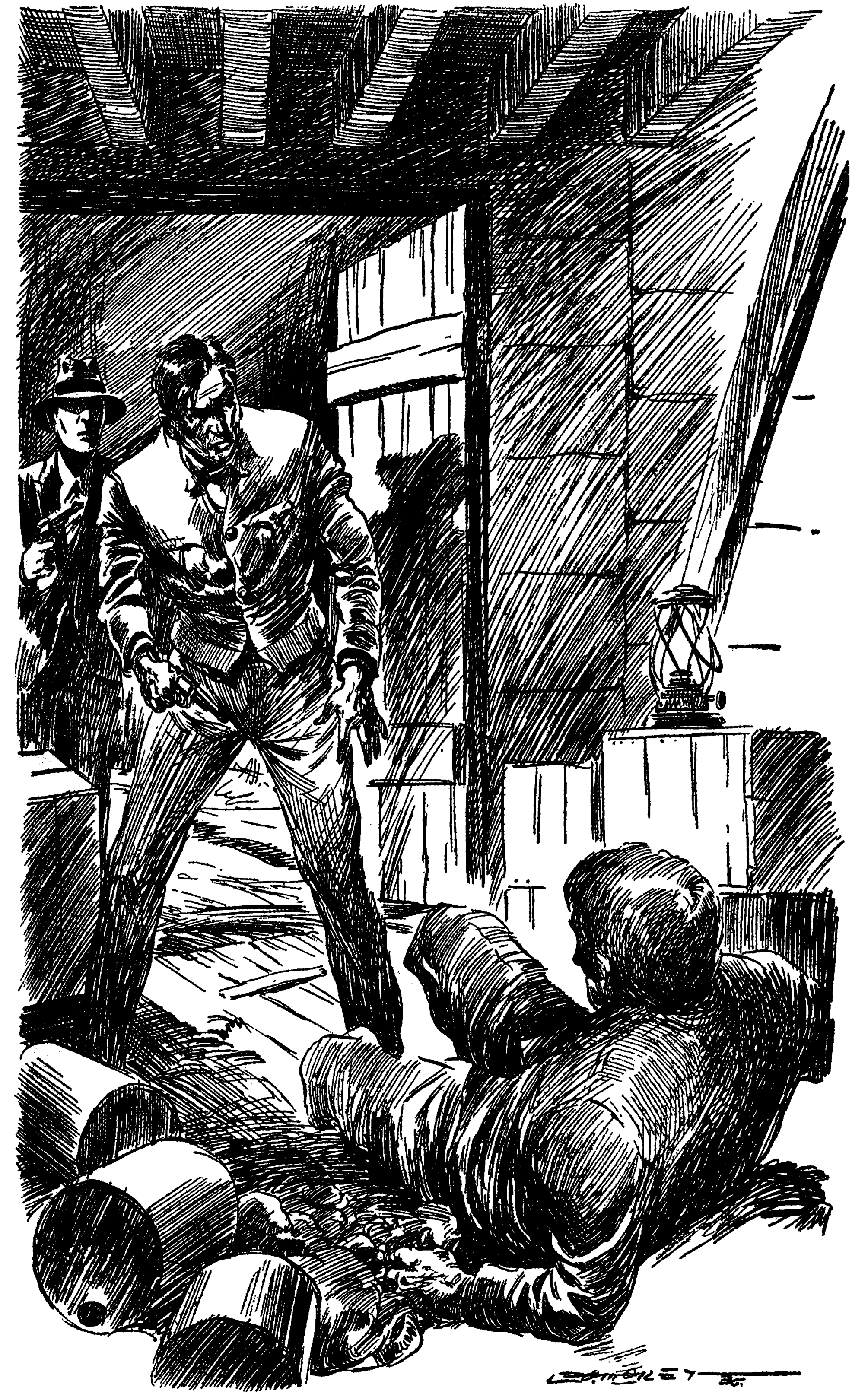
The Chinese drug peddler was still turning when Mega shot him. He fell, and the gangster walked over and bent down. The gun roared twice more within inches of the Oriental's chest.

"You were pretty good in your way, pal," the gangster said softly, straightening with the gasoline can in his hand. "I sorta hated to bump you. But when guys start getting the chill up their backs they're dangerous to the mob."

HE began sloshing gasoline over the table and burlap bags in the corner. With a jerk of his head to Silk to walk ahead of him, he poured a trail of the liquid in through the passage to the cellar, up the steps, and into the kitchen. Warning Silk to stand pat he sloshed more gasoline all over the front room and almost everything in it. Something seemed to strike him as funny, for he began to chuckle.

"It'll be a joke on the guy who owns the hotel next door," he said to Silk. "All the mob had rooms there for hideouts. Most of the time we came in through another underground passage. Too bad we can't stick around to watch it burn, pal."

Prodding Silk outside, he ordered the little valet into the front seat of the waiting truck. He climbed in himself and started the motor. From his coat pocket he took out a nondescript cigarette lighter and carefully polished it until no vestige of fingerprints could be left. Then he snapped a big thumb down. The flaming object arched through the air and fell through the open window into the gasoline-soaked rear room of the laundry.



Silk was thrown inside the barn like a sack of potatoes.

What followed then was almost an explosion. As the truck shot out of the alley and got away a sheet of flame went up inside the building and roared through the two rooms, turning them into an inferno. The glassed front gave way and fire shot through into the street. Cries began to fill the air. Someone raced to the corner and turned in an alarm just as two big cars dashed up and spilled out several men. Mega, looking back, uttered a curse, but his tone was a mixture of amazement tinged with relief.

"Those fellows are Feds, pal, or my eyes are getting bad," he muttered. "Another minute and you'd have been okay ... Hey, don't choke on me now!" For Silk seemed in imminent danger of doing just that. "Here, I'll take the gag out—somebody to talk to anyhow. But you'd better not try yellin'."

Behind them now flames threw a glow into the sky above Chinatown.

"I rather gather," Silk said dryly, when Joe Mega had jerked the gag from his mouth, "that Mr. Kasini's retail business will suffer something of a temporary set-back."

"Shut up!" growled the killer beside him. "I gotta think, I gotta think harder than I ever did before in my life. Every move we've made tonight has been busted up by that Black Bat. He nearly got Flash in old Ling's house. He slid into Chow's place and cleaned hlouse there. No tellin' where he'll show next."

He drove on with his bound prisoner beside him, half muttering. Silk knew it would be useless to try getting the door open and jumping. Mega could handle him with one hand, or shoot him in the back before he got far.

Silk was still turning over in his mind a possible solution to what had seemed to him to be a terrible new explosive weapon unleashed by the Dragon Master. When he first had been thrown into the truck by the pinheaded Chinese thug, he had half expected to find some kind of new infernal machine there. Actually there had been nothing he could see.

Presently, after they had driven out of the city, Joe Mega tuned the truck into a dim road that led back among some trees. Ahead lay a ramshackle house with sheds and farm implements scattered about. Beyond was the flat outline of a small truck farm. Joe Mega drove up without lights and braked to a stop behind the house, shutting off the motor.

"All right, pal, it's the end of the line for you," he growled at Silk, gripping him by the collar and shoving him out.

A man loomed up out of the night and spoke sharply in Chinese.

"Talk English," Joe Mega growled. "A thousand apologies, Dragon," the Chinese farmer replied. "I thought you were my brother, Chow Seto. I just caught a police broadcast from the city. All cars are searching for the men who robbed a warehouse and got away. All except three, they were found with a Black Bat insignia on their foreheads. One Dragon who was sent here earlier to me with a message will help you now."

WITH Joe Mega's blistering curses in his ears Silk was shoved toward a ramshackle barn. He was thrown inside like a sack of potatoes while Joe Mega and the gangster the Chinese had mentioned menaced him with their guns.

The place was foul and unsanitary beyond description. The rank smell of manure filled the air, and a lantern burned dimly. At one of the stalls Joe Mega placed his burly shoulder against an old work horse's hip and shoved the animal aside. He bent over the manger, fumbled in the darkness with one hand, heaved hard and lifted one end. When he picked up the lantern a narrow flight of stairs leading down was revealed.

They descended into a cellar below the barn where Silk was shoved toward a chair. As in the cellar room in the laundry, burlap bags were piled up in a corner. Silk's eyes, however, were on several small stacked crates. He would have paid them scant attention except for their effect upon Joe Mega. The gangster's jaw was sagging.

Those were the crates that had been taken from the museum less than twenty-four hours before!

CHAPTER XIV

Black Bat to the Rescue

RIDING atop the cab of the big laundry truck, the Black Bat still had held his precarious position as the machine sped out of town by a little used road and entered the country. Up ahead of him the leading truck clicked off its lights and crept on for a short distance, before finally turning off among a group of trees. The second truck with the Black Bat atop the cab followed. Tensed and ready, the Black Bat waited until the truck lurched into a rut, then swiftly slid to the ground.

He arose to his feet and sped toward the house. His night piercing eyes saw a third laundry truck parked in back of a ramshackle house. Aside from that, there was no sign of life about.

The Black Bat melted into the shadows of the Chinese farmer's home. No lights were visible as he slipped inside the house. The eyes behind the hood flicked over a small kitchen in a state of general untidiness. Near the stove were two objects that gave evidence the farmer who lived here spent much of his time in the kitchen. One was a dial telephone on a stand by a chair and the other was a high-powered radio adjusted to pick up police calls. The Black Bat picked up the receiver and a silk-gloved finger dialed the telepbone number of Walter Dugro. Dugro's voice itself answered.

"Good evening, Mr. Dugro," said the hooded man, "This is the Black Bat. I'm calling from the kitchen of a Chinese truck farmer about three miles out, I think, and I've called you because I understand Commissioner Warner is at your house. I've just arrived—unseen—with several members of the Dragon society after a raid some of the contingent made on a warehouse down in the dock district. I did my best to break it up, and at least caused Flash Mega to leave his safe-cutting equipment."

"The commissioner is here with me now, and has just heard the story from Headquarters," answered Dugro. "Just a moment—he's cutting in on a branch phone."

The gray-haired police official's crisp voice came over the wire.

"You, Black Bat, what's this about the Dragon society?"

"They've just gone into a barn out here, Commissioner, that I'm positive is too small to hold them all and the loot they're carrying. There must be an underground room of some sort. Here's the telephone number of this place. Trace the address. A flying squad of officers may be able to get out here and nab the entire outfit. All except Kasini and some of the Chinese members. I rather imagine they're the ones who have Belmont."

He gave Warner the number and told the official what had happened in the laundry in Chinatown when he had visited it, naturally omitting any mention of Butch. And he now learned that Chow Seto's place as well as the rickety hotel next to it had gone up in roaring flames just as a squad of Federal men had swooped down. The fire was still uncontrolled.

"I should have phoned about Chow Seto sooner, Commissioner," the Black Bat said, with regret in his voice. "However, I don't suppose it really matters. If you can get some men out here in a hurry, you can nab a number of the Dragon members red-handed."

The Black Bat quickly hung up the receiver as a sound came from somewhere behind him. Footsteps clomped onto the low back porch. Someone was coming. The Black Bat turned to step out of sight but stepped on a round stick of stove wood that acted like a roller. Even his cat-like muscles could not save him in time.

He hit the floor to the accompaniment of a clatter of, rattling pans. Someone shouted excitedly in Chinese and a porch switch flooded the kitchen with light. A husky Chinese farmer leaped through the door.

The Black Bat came up fast, then dived at the Chinese as the man reached for a button hidden beneath a two-by-four back of the door jamb. A buzzer of some sort. He caught the Oriental's wrist as the farmer began to scream a warning. The Black Bat's hard fist lashed out and silk-covered knuckles smacked hard against the man's jaw. But the heavy Chinese had the strength of a bull. His head rolled to one side with the blow and he tried for a ju-jitsu hold.

BUT such tricks were no secret to the Black Bat and they went down in a flurry of flying arms and legs. A foot sent the table crashing. The radio went rolling with a tinkle of broken tubes.

The hooded man tried to get out his gun but the wily Chinese held his wrist and was threatening to break it as he tried to bend it back. Both men were panting so desperately with the exertion that the Oriental was unable to cry out.

The single warning he had been able to give, however, had been enough. From outside came shots and the pound of running feet. The Chinese began to scream again, on his back on the floor. A brown hand snatched up a stick of stove wood. It went flying, then both men snapped to their feet again. For all his bulk, the Chinese was as quick as a cat. He plunged at the hooded figure as more feet hit the back porch, but in doing so he laid himself open to the kind of fighting that the Black Bat had learned from Butch O'Leary. The Black Bat's right fist came up in a short bone-snapping blow that numbed it to the elbow. The brother of Chow Seto went down and lay still.

The Black Bat wheeled toward the back door as men dived in. His twin .38s met fire with fire. One wild bullet shot out the light and chaos broke loose in the kitchen. A mobster went down in the doorway and another fell on top of him. The others who had come running whirled and dived back out into the night. Once again Kasini's mob were screaming to each other that the hooded devil was after them. He couldn't be shaken off. They were beginning to believe that no matter where they went that grim Nemesis would appear almost at once.

"That guy ain't human, I tell you!" Manni Torrio was shouting as he ran for the truck to get his chopper.

Inside the upset kitchen it was beginning to quiet down again as the last of the mobsters fled out, hacking away and shooting. The Black Bat, however, was no longer there. He had ducked out the way he had come in. His hooded form flitted toward the truck where Torrio was emerging with his sub-machine gun. Before the mobster realized what had happened, the Black Bat had swung a hard blow at his jaw and grabbed the weapon, as Torrio screamed in fear and fell. From the protection of the truck's front the deadly weapon began stuccato barking.

Crouching under cover whenever possible, the Black Bat began working his way toward the barn. The mobsters themselves had fled to various vantage points. But the Black Bat had to see what was in that barn. As he reached it, and dodged inside, yellow light was coming from an underground room through a manger. The Black Bat slid over to the manger and looked down a lantern-lit opening—straight into the disguised face of Silk Norton who was coming up the rough stairs. Left alone in the commotion Silk had managed to get himself loose from his bonds.

Swiftly, Silk related what had happened. He told tersely of his capture by Ohmo in the alley, of the murder of Chow Seto, and of Tatega bringing him to the farm.

"The farmer is Chow Seto's brother, sir," the little man said. "I gather they use this place as a second storeroom for their drugs. And the stolen art collection was brought here! All the crates are downstairs."

"Good! McGrath's on his way out here now with a flying squad. He can put a heavy guard over that treasure until morning."

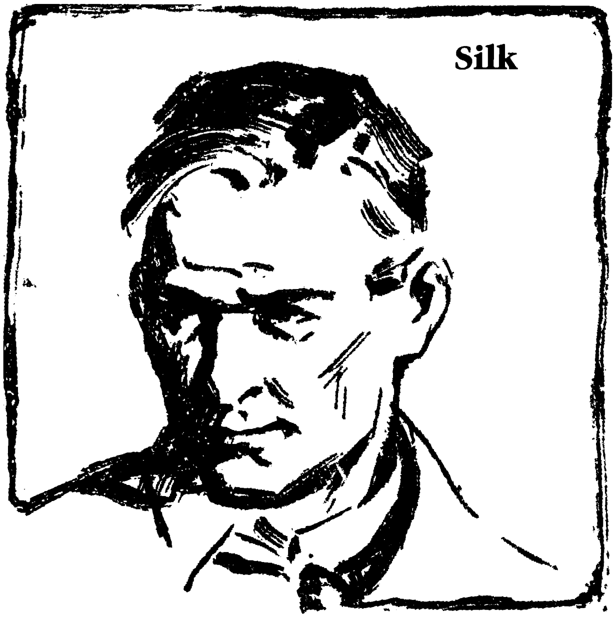
"I'm afraid it would do little good, sir," the valet said wryly. "There seems to have been a slight switch made. When Joe Mega broke open one of the crates, all he found was an ordinary vase of baked red clay. It's now smashed into about a thousand pieces. Mega was that angry."

That clinched the suspicions about the Dragon Master that the Black Bat had imparted to I-tso Ling. He had been sure that the man in green had no intention of returning the treasure, but was using the others as dupes. Of course it was the Dragon Master who had made the substitution.

"We've got to get out of here in a hurry, Silk," the Black Bat said as they hurried toward the door. "We'll take one of the trucks and you drive. I'll cover us with the machine gun."

THEY got away in the same truck Silk had been brought in. As they pulled out, the Chinese farmer came staggering out of the house shouting that he had heard the Black Bat telephoning the police. And at that information the mobsters were too busy with their own affairs to do more than fire a few shots at the escaping truck.

"We hadn't been in the barn but a little while," Silk flnally said, as the truck sped along far ahead of the shooting, "until the others showed up with the loot they'd taken from the warehouse. And the minute they opened some of the stolen cans, you should have heard them yell! Those tins didn't contain dope, sir—there was nothing in them but ordinary mud! Which made me think that the tip Duke Kasini got about any contraband being in the warehouse was a trap set by narcotics agents."



"It looks that way. Yet for some unexplainable reason the Federal men arrived just a bit too late."

Silk nodded, his eyes on the road ahead. "So it would seem, sir. But those Dragons were really upset when they found the treasure was missing. Mega stormed and cursed. Somebody suggested that Kasini had double-crossed and framed his own men. But they were all wild, sir—and scared to death."

The Black Bat nodded and smiled beneath his hood.

"Things are beginning to happen, Silk—plenty," he said.

A GROUP of grim-faced men were in the living room of Dugro's home when Captain McGrath returned from a dash to the farm of Chow Seto's brother at instructions from Commissioner Warner. He reported to his superior that all the gangsters had fled, though some undoubtedly would be rounded up. Heffner, one of the remaining members of Eight Incorporated, angular, bony-faced and with a clipped gray mustache, sat on a couch, his mental stress plain in his eyes. Dr. Ling was there, and the little art expert had been horrified at learning that the Dragon Master had been in his own home. Colonel Wang and Paul Chivor were also present. Chivor was mostly silent, as usual, speaking only occasionally in low-toned Cantonese with Colonel Wang.

Dugro was in pretty bad shape. His left ankle was bandaged and rested straight out on an ottoman in front of his armchair. His head was swathed in bandages that covered a cheek which had been ripped open by a broken limb when he crashed down through the tree branches in his parachute.

"Those twenty-four-foot service chutes weren't built for joy-riding, but only to get a man down safely," he explained. "If I had seen the tree sooner, I could have slipped the chute and missed it. Lord, what a night!"

"The question is, what is to be done now," spoke up Dr. Ling in his precise English. "In view of the Dragon Master's unexpected appearance in my house to ask me to act as intermediary, I have decided to assume that responsibility. Some settlement must be arranged about the treasure, for already two lives have been taken because of it, and more are threatened."

Heffner looked at Commissioner Warner.

"What do you advise, Commissioner?" he suggested.

The police veteran shook his head. "I'm not advising, Mr. Heffner. The decision as to whether the demands of this Dragon Master shall be met rests with the members of Eight Incorporated who are still alive."

A pleasant voice came from the doorway.

"Exactly my sentiments, Commissioner Warner. Good evening, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XV
Last Warning

EVERY man in the room twisted about to look at the hooded figure in black who stood in the doorway. He held an automatic in one hand and the gun seemed to be pointed more in Captain McGrath's direction than at any of the others. The Black Bat smiled at the expression on the big officer's face.

"How'd you get through those cops out there?" demanded McGrath as the Black Bat came in and placed himself so that he could watch all doors.

"It's not their fault, Captain. Now that I am here I want to say that I'm sorry you didn't get those birds out at that farm before they had flown tonight. I'm more disappointed about the treasure. I thought we had it."

"So did I," growled the detective disgustedly. "But there wasn't a thing in a single crate but red clay pottery. But we got the Chinese farmer who owned the place. Found him hiding out in a ditch in the field. He broke for it and one of the officers downed him. He talked before he died. Said he had helped the Dragon Master bring the stuff from somewhere in town and exchange it. Then the leader in the green robes took it away."

"Unfortunate," said the Black Bat, "That farmer, Captain, was the brother of Chow Seto, the laundryman from whose establishment Duke Kasini's drugs were retailed. Chow Seto was killed by Joe Mega tonight, shot in the back when the Chinese became frightened. Incidentally, Captain, you can swear out a murder charge against Mega for the clubbing to death of the museum watchman when the treasure was stolen. Witnesses were Manni Torrio and Blackie, other members of the Kasini mob. I heard them discussing it at the warehouse robbery tonight."

"Well, I must say that I owe you an apology, Black Bat," put in Dugro warmly. "Had I known of the service you're rendering in this case I'd never have fired at you when you tried to stop me taking off in that plane, frightened though I was. Naturally I thought you were one of the Dragon Master's men, after Harrison.

"You think then that these Chinese were members of Kasini's mob also, as well as of that Dragon society?"

"It's my theory that only four Chinese in this case are actual criminals—the three who worked Chow Seto's Laundry, all of whom are dead, and likewise Chow Seto's brother, whose farm evidently was used as a drug cache. The rest of the Orientals have been duped into believing they're doing a great patriotic service for their mother country. There is one exception, of course. The monstrosity known as Ohmo."

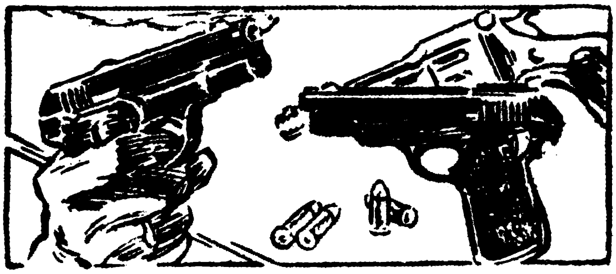
"That's the ape Thing that grabbed Quinn in his house and also got Belmont," said McGrath, biting down viciously on his ever present cigar. "According to the officers on duty when I got there after the snatch, Belmont's Chinese valet began yelling from the front room, and they all responded except one man in the back. He turned just as the Thing grabbed him and almost broke his neck with a blow of its hand. It paralyzed him. Then the Thing went on, and a minute or two later was out again, carrying Belmont like a baby. By the time it got away that damned, doublecrossing Chinese valet had run through a door leaving the officers in the front room, snapped the lock, and then beat it out the back way before they could break through."

"That Thing, as you so aptly call it," said the Black Bat, "undoubtedly is possessed of hyper senses and the cunning of a jungle beast. Furthermore, I'm certain it or he was the instrument of destruction that killed those two police officers tonight."

Warner had been watching the Black Bat with vivid interest, and now he leaned forward in his chair tensely.

"Black Bat," he said tightly, "if you would tell the police who killed Fitzgerald and Murphy and how this green-robed madman did it, I'd almost write you a clean slate."

"Thank you, Commissioner, but I haven't been able to solve that riddle yet. All I'm certain of is—"



HE stopped short as from somewhere outside came the voices of two or three police officers, followed by some man's voice speaking angrily. Then footsteps sounded on the front porch.

"I'm all right, I tell you," snapped Harvey Belmont's voice. "You'd better remain outside."

The door opened and the financier strode in. He closed it behind him and stalked over to Commissioner Warner. Warner had risen, trying to mask his surprise at this sudden appearance of the financier. Moreover, Belmont looked anything but the victim of a kidnapping. He was dressed as though for the office, immaculate and dapper.

"You were supposed to give me protection, Commissioner?" he accused hotly. "What kind of a police force have we got in this town when a man is snatched from his own home under the noses of half a dozen officers?"

"Sit down, Mr. Belmont," said the commissioner quietly. "Suppose you just begin at the beginning and let's get this kidnapping business straight."

The financier sat down. He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

"It happened early this evening," Belmont began to tell the commissioner, twisting his thin, nervous handa as he had in Quinn's house. "As you know, I had sent away all servants except my Chinese valet. Quong, I knew was loyal—he has been with me for seven years. I was getting ready to call Harrison and find out if he still meant to leave town or had decided to stay. Then came that horrible—Thing! I caught one glimpse of its pinhead and naked shoulders before it almost broke my neck with some kind of a ju-jutsu blow. It slung me across its shoulders and ran like the wind across the grounds to where a laundry truck was waiting in the darkness."

"Who was in it?" put in McGrath.

"I—I saw only some Chinese. That monster Thing threw me in the back and jumped right in with me. Someone taped my eyes. They kept cursing the avaricious Americans who were cheating China in her hour of need. We rode for quite some time until we came to a house. I've no idea where. The tape was never removed from my eyes. I was cursed and mauled and threatened but was not harmed otherwise."

"What became of your valet?" the commissioner asked. "We'll be able to pick him up easily."

For the first time, Harvey Belmont's eyes showed emotion. Into them came a look of sorrow. He shook his head,

"They shot him in that house they took me to, to insure against that very thing. It seems unbelievable that he would have been a party to such a thing as this Dragon business hold-up game. The poor fellow idolized me. Why, he'd even taught me to speak a few words of Chinese—like good-by and good morning and things like that.

"I was held in that house and threatened until I finally agreed to their demands. As soon as I did, they took me out again and set me loose somewhere in the city. Two radio policemen found me stumbling along with my eyes still taped and my hands tied behind my back. I made them take me home first before bringing me here."

He reached into his pocket and brought forth a small object that all of them in that room had seen before. It was a little green jade Buddha with a note snapped around it by rubber bands—the same Buddha that had been taken by Thompson from Tony Quinn's house. The financier handed the jade piece to Commissioner Warner.

"There are the demands, Commissioner, to which I've already agreed," he snapped, and added bluntly: "What else can a man do when he can get no police protection?"

QUIETLY the police official took the note from around the Buddha and opened it. He read:

> To Those Concerned: This is the last warning from the Dragon. This is the last chance for those remaining members of the evil eight to accede to our just demands. Ten million dollars in cash must be collected at once and held in readiness to be delivered at the prescribed time and place. As soon as indications are given that these instructions are being followed, arrangements will be made for the return of the treasure and the money turned over to responsible representative of the Chinese Government.
>
> The Dragon has spoken.

Commissioner Warner passed the note around for the others to read and when it was returned to him he put it in his pocket. He said nothing for a moment. Finally, he spoke.

"You say you've agreed to raise the money, Mr. Belmont?"

Heffner's face expressed angry indignation. He shot the official a hostile look fraught with meaning.

"Eight million and not a cent more, Commissioner!" he snapped. "Threats or no threats!"

He turned to look defiantly at the Black Bat as he hurled his ultimatum, but the window drapes near which the man in black had stood hung emptily. The Black Bat was gone.

CHAPTER XVI
Surprise Visit

WHILE Tony Quinn breakfasted on Silk's incomparable waffles stripped with bacon, and coffee early the following morning, he perused the early editions of the newspapers. He sat in the kitchen in his dressing gown while the little valet attended to the dishes and kept an eye out for the two officers on duty about the grounds.

The papers were filled with the story of Belmont's kidnapping and subsequent release, though the banker had been tight-lipped to reporters on all details concerning the treasure or any statement concerning payment to the Chinese society. But there was one other account of significance. Heffner's home had been damaged by a mysterious explosion in the early hours of tht morning! But the only damage done was to tear away a large section of an enclosed back porch.

"Did you read this account of Heffncr's home being bombed, Silk?" asked Quinn.

"Yes, sir. I went through the papers before you got up."

"I see also where the body of Belmont's Chinese valet was fished out of the river early this morning," remarked Quinn. "A barge captain tied up at a pier saw it and notified the police. They recovered two bullets for the ballistic experts."

"That at least is something, sir."

Carol padded in from the spare bedroom she had occupied during the night, having difficulty keeping a pair of Quinn's house slippers on her feet. Her pretty face, minus the clever makeup Silk had applied the night before, rose above the folds of one of Quinn'a silk dressing gowns beneath which she wore a pair of his pajamas.

"I'm starved," she announced. "Furthermore, I think it rude of you not to awaken me."

While she ate the breakfast Silk quickly prepared for her, Quinn discussed the case with them both, and what their next moves should be. Then Butch slipped in through the tunnel.

"Nope, no breakfast for me right now," he declined, at Silk's look. "I had a snack—two plates of ham and eggs and toast and four cups of …

"Swell, all right, I'll drink another cup of coffee with Carol. What's on the fire for today?"

"You, Carol, will stay on here as nurse," Quinn instructed. "And, Silk, I want you to find out where Paul Chivor is staying."

"Commissioner Warner has already mentioned that he and Colonel Wang are at the Hotel Lamont, sir. I believe it's not far from Chinatown."

Later in the morning, Quinn and Butch left the house by the tunnel, Quinn wearing his usual broad-brimmed black hat pulled low over his eyes. A telephone call to the Hotel Lamont asking for Chivor in Room One Twenty-eight had elicited the information that Chivor's room was Two Twenty-six and that he was out.

Tony Quinn, the Black Bat now that he was again on the prowl, even in the bright morning hours, headed his car in the direction of Chinatown and the Hotel Lamont.

The hotel at which the flying Chinese colonel and the American pilot were staying proved to be a brick affair some five stories high. Butch stopped the coupé a short distance away and Quinn got out, his collar turned up. No one paid particular attention to the man who strolled along the sidewalk and then suddenly vanished. Quinn's lithe muscles carried him up over a board fence and into a small yard paved with brick. Overhead was a fire-escape. He leaped for the lower rung, pulled himself up and went up to the second floor. He stepped into a carpeted hallway lined with doors on each side. Two Twenty-six was three doors down on the right.

QUINN'S skeleton keys quickly extracted a lock's secret and he slipped inside of the room occupied byPaul Chivor.

He began a quick search of the man's belongings. The two steamer trunks, however, were protected by a lock of some devilish combination so small that even Quinn's keys were helpless against them.

He gave it up and looked about him,

The dresser drawers revealed nothing, so he went to the clothes closet. A low exclamation came from him as his silk-clad fingers felt a small metal object in a pocket of one of the suits. He brought forth a numbered disk that was an exact duplicate of the one Butch had taken from Chow Seto's place the night before!

"So Paul Chivor is a drug user," the Black Bat said under his breath. "Probably started hitting the stuff in China. When he came over here with Wang and the treasure, he had to find a new source of supply. So he contacted Chow Seto's Laundry and this is his identification which—"

He broke off in his soliloquy, his hypersensitive ears warning him that someone was in the hall.

"No, sir, Mr. Chivor," he heard a woman's voice say, "I haven't got to your room yet but I will right away." Quinn stepped into a corner. With remarkable speed he slipped from his light coat and hat into the Black Bat outfit. He rolled his discarded clothing into a compact bundle and stowed it away just as the Black Bat rig had been. Footsteps were coming down the hall.

But to the Black Bat's surprise, Chivor's soft footsteps on the thick carpeting went right on past his own door and down the hall toward the fire-escape through which the Black Bat had entered. The Black Bat risked cracking the door a trifle. He saw the pilot stop in front of a corner room, glance casually about, then unlock the door and step inside.

Paul Chivor was sneaking into Colonel Wang's room!

The Black Bat opened the door wider, glanced up and down the hall. The maid's brooms and linen cart stood outside a door further down. From inside the room came the hum of her voice as she cleaned the room. The Black Bat stepped out, became a flitting shadow down the hall, pausing before Colonel Wang's door.

Gently he turned the knob. He slid into the room, a .38 automatic in one hand as Chivor, a cool look on his face, turned and faced him.

"Good morning, Mr. Chivor," greeted the Black Bat quietly.

The cool look left the pilot's face instantly and gave way to something resentfully surly. His handsome features grew dark.

"You certainly seem to get around, don't you?" he grunted.

"Sometimes it's unavoidably necessary," replied the Black Bat. Then his voice grew suddenly stern, "Why did you find it convenient to become intoxicated the other night when you were expected to save a man's life by flying him out of town?" he demanded.

"I told you why," Chivor said grumpily. "I stopped in at a bar and just happened to take a couple too many."

The Black Bat smiled beneath the black hood hiding his scarred features from this man who was so much of an enigma.

"I'm afraid I hardly can believe that, Mr. Chivor," he replied softly. "When I shook you awake in the chair in the watchman's office out at the hangar, your eyes showed undeniable surprise at sight of me when you opened them. You quickly closed them to keep from showing it, feigning sleepiness due to overindulgence in alcohol. Further, you sobered up with remarkable speed on the coffee I gave you."

"Which means what?" growled Chivor, his eyes narrowing speculatively.

"That you had some reason for not wanting to fly Mr. Harrison in that death plane. You either knew that that plane was carrying him to his death or you had some other reason for not wanting to leave town."

Slowly the Black Bat's hand unclosed. A bright disk was lying in his black, silk-gloved palm.

"Mr. Chivor," he said, looking the man straight in the eyes, "would it by any chance have been that you had just put in an order to Chow Seto's Laundry for some heroin or other dope earlier in the day, and were waiting around for a new supply of the 'snow' to show up?"

Chivor refused to answer.

CHAPTER XVII

A Call on a Lady

UTTER silence blanketed the room for a moment. The Black Bat was swiftly turning over in his mind the facts that Silk had found out about Chivor's life in California, of how the man had had his regular transport pilot's license taken away by a civil aeronautics inspector for stunting when he had been drinking too heavily.

The Black Bat also was remembering that the Asiation Export and Import outfit which Harvey Belmont now owned was a West Coast concern. Or had been before getting into trouble with the State Department over the shipment of planes to European belligerents as military fighters. That meant Chivor had known Belmont before seeing him here.

The hooded investigator tried a shot in the dark.

"Mr. Chivor," he said, "as you probably know, Harvey Belmont owns a good deal of the stock in Mr. Dugro's present factory, presumably having been his financial backer. That means you undoubtedly knew Mr. Belmont while you were flying out on the Coast, and probably Mr. Dugro as well, since one of their principal concerns out there was the Asiation Export and Import Company. Could your present dislike for Mr. Dugro—which has been plainly evident to me ever since you showed no concern that he might have been killed in that exploding plane—have any connection with your having been grounded while flying for them out there?"

The pilot's eyes began to grow hard and more speculative. Otherwise he displayed nothing more to express the evident surprise the Black Bat's question had caused.

"I'll say one thing for you, Black Bat, you really do find out things, don't you?" he admitted begrudgingly. "If you want to know the truth, I was flying for Dugro out there before he sold the outfit to Belmont. Dugro went to China to sell new ships to that Government. But that didn't pan out, so he came back and got in touch with Belmont again. As near as I can find out, Dugro was sorry about Belmont losing too much dough in the company through him. In other words, Dugro had sold ships to Spain as fighters before he realized he was breaking the law. By the time Old Whiskers caught up with Asiation Export, Belmont was left holding the sack.

"Anyhow"—he shrugged—"Belmont turned right around and backed Dugro in this new venture, to get back the dough he'd lost. This present Chinese plane order will do it, with a couple of millions profit for Belmont."

"If Colonel Wang okays the Dugro bomber," supplemented the Black Bat.

"If the colonel okays the ship," Chivor repented, nodding. "But I might as well tell you—that bomber is no good. It's a death-trap. I've tried to tell Wang so, but he's one of those methodical Chinese who's got to find out things for himself. He'll find it out, too, if he ever puts into a spin with a load test. She'll wind up like a corkscrew. It's in the design of the wing."

The Black Bat then asked Chivor bluntly why he had entered Wang's room so surreptitiously. But Chivor only growled something about being Wang's friend, and refused to answer further. Under the muzzle of the Black Bat's .38, Chivor left the room and entered his own. As soon as the pilot had closed his door the Black Bat, left in the dim hall, stripped off his hooded disguise and hastily donned his coat and hat, leaving again by the fire-escape.

"What did you find out, Boss?" Butch demanded eagerly as the car was headed back toward the estate.

The Black Bat shook his head and frowned.

"Nothing of importance, except that Chivor is the new costumer whose number was added to that of the laundry's customers."

"You think maybe he could be figuring on grabbing the dough all for himself when it's delivered?" suggested Butch.

"I wish I knew what has been decided about that payoff," was the Black Bat's only answer.

THERE was only one way to find out, and as soon as the Black Bat was again Tony Quinn, safely home and in his bedroom, he called Commissioner Warner on the telephone.

"Good morning, Commissioner," he greeted, his voice that of the sick man he was supposed to be. "How are you?"

Commissioner Warner's voice told how he was. From its tone Quinn judged that the gray-haired police veteran had not slept much.

"Frankly, Tony," he told Quinn, "I'm on edge. With the money to redeem that treasure being raised this morning, and—"

"How much?' Quinn interrupted. "Ten millions. Belmont and his associates are drawing on banks all over town. Of course you'll be called on for your share—if you haven't been already. Heffner has changed his mind most decidedly and is having more brought in by a special plane this morning. From out of town banks. He is frightened stiff. That explosion which tore off the corner of the back porch of his house came too close for comfort."

"Silk read me the account of it, Commissioner," Quinn said. "Wasn't there any clue of any sort?"

"Not a thing. Just a pile of splintered wood and broken glass. The grounds were alive with police officers, too—and they didn't hear a thing until the explosion came. There isn't a trace of any wiring, or any metal fragments of a bomb to be found by our experts. The thing seemed to come right out of thin air, just as it did at your place."

Quinn asked about developments in the apprehension of Duke Kasini and his now decimated mob.

"They've disappeared as though swished right off the face of the Earth, Tony," Warner informed, and sighed heavily. "We've combed this town with a fine-tooth comb—and not a sign of them."

Tony Quinn spoke a few minutes longer, then waited through the day, lying in bed and reading, though he was on tenterhooks, impatient to take a hand in the game. He was willing enough to put up his share of the redemption money, if there wasn't any other way, but he much preferred to get the treasure back.

There would be a reasonable profit for him and the remaining members of the Eight later, even by paying ten millions, but he wanted that money to go to the proper channels. He was not thinking of profit for himself.

As soon as it was dark, the Black Bat went on the prowl again.

Once more when the Black Bat reached the locality, a blanket of darkness lay over Chinatown. Neon signs from a hundred cafés and other places threw their iridescent glow against the night as though trying to push back its enveloping folds. On the crooked, cobblestoned streets the tide of humanity moved on, as ceaseless as the flow of a river.

From the darkness of a rooftop the Black Bat stood peering down a moment. Then on his felt-soled shoes he moved like a wraith across the roofs toward Dr. Ling's home.

As the Black Bat had suggested to I-tso Ling, she had left the skylight unlatched. That meant that she also had disposed of the servants temporarily, so that there would be none to be frightened by the Black Bat's sudden appearance. His silk-gloved fingers raised the lid and there came a rustling sound as he went down the steep steps into the upper hall.

He crept on noiseless feet to the second floor below. At the door of I-tso's bedroom he paused a moment, listening. From somewhere down in the shop on the ground floor came a faint murmur of voices. The Black Bat's hand turned the knob to the girl's bedroom and he went in.

She was not there, but in the darkness his night-trained eyes soon saw the piece of white paper tucked in the shaded lamp beside her bed. He crossed the room and unfolded the note. There was no need for him to turn on the light. Her writing was as plain to his eyes as though it had been broad daylight. She had written:

> Black Bat,
> If I'm not in when you come, I'll try to be in my father's shop downstairs,
> I-tso Ling.

THE Black Bat took time to burn the note behind cupped hands before leaving. As he started down to the shop floor, he discovered that the stairs leading down into the shop came out on a small balcony landing before going on down. From this the proprietor could see over his wares from above, as well as observe any customers who might have entered while he was out.

From this landing the Black Bat now looked down to where I-tso Ling, her patriarchal little father, the professor, and Harvey Belmont were speaking. Strangely enough no lights were on, and the front shades were drawn tight.

Harvey Belmont was exhibiting extreme nervousness. In the darkness the Black Bat could see him twisting his thin hands as he usually did when under stress.

"I got the message just a few minutes ago," he was explaining to Dr. Ling. "I came right on down alone at once as I was instructed. There are no police about, the guards all having been withdrawn from us as the Dragon Master ordered."

"To say that I am horrified at what you have told me is a weak statement, Mr. Belmont," said the little Chinese art expert. He touched his daughter on the arm. "And now, my child, you will go upstairs to your room. This is a matter that does not concern one of such tender years. Mr. Belmont is here on a very grave mission. Go."

The girl obediently turned and felt her way up the steps. She made her way along the landing toward the second short flight leading up to the floor above. As she did so a hand crept out of the drapes and lightly touched hers. She gave a faint little gasp of surprise.

Then the Black Bat's whisper came softly in her ear, "Wait for me in your room."

The girl went on up the stairs and the Black Bat moved unseen down into the shop. He stood within five feet of the two men, yet neither were aware of it.

"But that's the orders that I received, Dr. Ling," Belmont was saying. "I was to come here to your shop and look for the instructions."

"May I ask what instructions, gentlemen?" asked a pleasant voice.

Belmont gave a half strangled cry of fear and stepped back, almost stumbling over a stone Buddha on the floor behind him. He recovered, however, as he seemed to recognize their visitor.

"How did you get in here?" demanded Dr. Ling crisply.

"A part of my—er—professional ethics, Dr. Ling. I believe that Mr. Belmont has been given orders by the Dragon Master to come here and look for instructions—right?"

"And I've been warned that if I make one false move I'll die by being blown to bits," the financier said quickly. "There was no mistaking the menace in that voice that spoke to me on the telephone. It said that I was to come here to Dr. Ling's art shop and look for a little green jade Buddha that was part of the collection of stolen Chinese art. It was an exact duplicate of the one that was presented to Anthony Quinn."

"In that case, gentlemen, you need not bother to turn on the light," the Black Bat told them, and moved quickly away. "If you'll just stand there for a moment, I shall be glad to get it for you."

It took him less than two minutes to find the familiar-looking little Buddha. It was back among a number of other art pieces on a small shelf, and when the Black Bat picked it up, he discovered that a folded note was on the under side, held in place by rubber bands. The Black Bat returned with it.

“Here it is, gentlemen,” he announced gravely.

“Now come with me, both of you,” said Dr. Ling.

In a back room that served as office for the little Chinese, Dr. Ling switched on a light. Harvey Belmont took the Buddha and unfolded the note. The Bat, peering over his shoulder, read:

> The Dragon is pleased to see that you have come to your senses, Mr. Belmont. It is regrettable that your two foolish colleagues were not so wise. The money you have raised toay will be placed in a large suitcase. You will do this alone and without telephoning the police. At precisely ten o'clock tonight you will return to the Lings' shop and daliver this suitcase there. I left your instructions here so that you would have no trouble in finding the place when you deliver the money. To disobey means death.
>
> The Dragon has spoken.

“But, gentlemen,” gasped Dr. Ling, when he also had read the note, his almond eyes going first to one and then the other of his two unusual visitors, “this would appear as though I myself am a party to his insidious scheme, and I swear that never has that jade piece been in my humble establishment before this night.”

“Quite likely it was left here by one of the many people who came in during the day to browse,” suggested the Black Bat. “But it shows a devilish cunning on the part of the Dragon Master. By the time the money is delivered here it will be ordered taken to some other person. That way only one person will know where the final delivery to the Dragon Master himself will be made and in what manner. Very clever, gentlemen.”

“Too clever,” shot back Harvey Belmont, in a rage. “To think that a man would spend his life building up something only to have it taken away by some gangster from whom the police can't protect him. It's—”

But he spoke only to an empty doorway where the Black Bat had stepped back, for the hooded figure had vanished.

CHAPTER XVIII

Death of a Rat

CAUTIOUSLY the Bat slipped upstairs and opened the door to I-tso's bedroom. The girl was waiting in the darkened room.

“I'm frightened, Black Bat, very frightened,” she confessed to him, coming nearer to him as though for protection. “You haven't forgotten I told you there's to be a meeting of the Dragons tonight at the regular place deep beneath the block of condemned buildings sometime near midnight?”

“I looked for an entrance last night after leaving the farm of Chow Seto's brother, but found only a steel door two flights down,” the Black Bat said. “I had a pretty good idea that it is wired, so I did not go too close to it, I tried to find another entrance, but found none,”

“There is one more—which I will tell you about,” the girl whispered quickly. “But about this meeting—only Duke Kasini and his men will be present, except for the Dragon Master. They are to be paid off for opening the vault. The Chinese members who have been hiding them from the police have already been disbanded. The Dragon society is no more.”

“Then why are you frightened?”

“Because,” she said, “at ten o'clock tonight I have been ordered by the Dragon Master on pain of death to me and to my honorable father to take a certain suitcase full of money and deliver it to the home of Anthony Quinn!”

For an instant that was a startler for the Black Bat, but he showed nothing of his surprise. Here was a strange new twist, but he would be able to straighten it out all right, particularly now that he was forewarned.

“Don't worry too much about it,” he told the Chinese girl. “I'll try to be around the Quinn house when you arrive, so I can telephone Commissioner Warner as soon as I find out where Quinn is going with that suitcase you deliver.”

After a few more words with the girl, he went up through the skylight again. Down in the street he sought the nearest telephone booth, and called the commissioner. The harried police official was still in his office.

“Good evening, Commissioner,” the hooded man in the closed booth said. “This is the Black Bat. Have there been any new developments in the treasure ransom case yet?”

“Only one,” answered the commissioner, who was always secretly glad to cooperate with the Black Bat. “Belmont has been ordered to deliver the money personally to some other person tonight. He couldn't—or wouldn't—tell me who that person is.”

“I think I can enlighten you, Commissioner. The ransom is to be delivered by Harvey Belmont to Dr. Ling.”

“Ling?” The commissioner's voice was startled, “It doesn't seem possible that—”

“And that isn't all,” the Black Bat cut in, “Ling doesn't know it yet, but his own daughter has been ordered, on a threat of death, to take the money to Tony Quinn's house immediately upon its delivery to her father.”

An explosive growl came from the other end of the line.

"The devil you say! But that means I'll probably get orders through Belmont to pull off the guard around Quinn's house—with that Dragon outfit after Quinn. If I pull off that guard, I may be a party to Tony Quinn's murder!"

"It's something we'll have to risk, Commissioner. I can't imagine who Quinn is expected to contact with the money. Have you any knowledge of Paul Chivor's whereabouts?"

"I telephoned his hotel—the Lamont—a little while ago but he's not in. Neither is Colonel Wang."

"Well, anyhow, here's some news of the utmost importance, Commissioner. Tonight the remaining members of Duke Kasini's fugitive mob are assembling at the orders of the Dragon Master. They'll be in a secret room deep beneath a group of condemned buildings on Exeter Street in Chinatown. If you'll wait until they all gather and then surround that building with picked men, you probably will be able to bag the entire lot. Good luck, Commissioner."

QUINN left the telephone booth and headed toward Exeter Street. The Chinese girl had given him exact instructions in the matter of effecting an entrance through one of the two passages. He wanted to find the thug Ohmo and, if necessary, put an end to the murderous monstrosity before it took more human life. And I-tso had told the Black Bat that Ohmo lived deep below the buildings when not on his grim errands for the green-robed Dragon Master.

Presently the Black Bat crawled in through a gaping window yawning in the night. He made his way along a crumbling hallway that had felt the passage of a thousand tenants. The floor was littered with refuse and fallen plaster and crumpled newspapers. Small wonder that the entire block of ancient slum edifices had been condemned by the city. Small wonder, too, that the Dragon Master had had a meeting room hastily prepared there when organizing the Dragun society.

And he had taken just the right way to draw the Chinese members into that murderous organization. The Black Bat knew Chinese psychology, knew how secret meetings, a green-robed leader, and a just cause to aid the mother country in her hour of need would appeal to the Orientals. Though most of them had taken little part in the affairs of the Dragon society, aside from helping in the kidnapping of Harvey Belmont. One Dragon had been a servant in the Belmont house.

The Black Bat moved into the small kitchen of an ancient flat to an ordinary trap-door that led to a cellar. He raised it and went down. Through an underground passage he went on beneath three or four of the condemned tenement houses.

In the last of several cellars he passed through he paused. He knew he now was beneath the main building and somewhere near the meeting room. A peculiarly offensive odor came to his nostrils. It came from behind the next doors.

The Black Bat's automatic came out as he grasped the knob. He opened it slowly, stepped into a room that he at once knew was the living quarters of Ohmo, the deformed Chinese. There was a pile of dirty blankets in a corner that served as bed, and a conglomeration of food-stuffs on a makeshift table in another corner. But the mute was nowhere about.

As the Black Bat looked about the room, voices came from somewhere nearby. He went out and turned into another short passage. There were heavy drapes ahead. He parted them with a finger to look through—and felt cold chills of surprise at sight of I-tso Ling talking to Flash Mega in front of a makeshift altar surmounted by a dragon's head! Beyond and below was the main meeting room.

How could I-tso have reached here ahead of him, he wondered. Then he remembered that after leaving her he had lost a little time making his telephone call. Evidently she had hurried here immediately. Why? Had she come to prepare a trap for the Black Bat in obedience to orders from the Dragon Master? Or could she have come to help him, in case he ran into trouble?

The fugitive gangster was far from the flashy character he had been only two days before. His swarthy face registered the fact that he was well aware that Duke Kasini's mob was in a tight spot. Even so, at the moment his black eyes were all for the girl. He had a coil of fine electric wire in one hand.

"Listen, baby, I've been trying to see you," he was saying to I-tso, "We're getting paid off tonight. Only the Dragon guy is giving me and Joe all the mob's dough for wiring this joint with nitro. He's gonna blow all the rest of 'em into a thousand pieces. I ain't told Joe yet. But do you know what that means? With all the dough I'm getting tonight it's South America for me. But you're gonna be a fugitive, too—you're in on this Dragon business—so I've got the cute idea that I'm taking you with me tonight."

BEFORE she could express the contempt for the mobster that was plain in her eyes a buzzer almost over the Black Bat's head sounded twice. Someone was at the steel door at the opposite side of the room. The Black Bat melted back as Flash Mega's diamond-studded hand reached inside the curtains within inches of the Black Bat's' face and pressed a button. From across the room came the click of an electrically operated bolt and the door swung open. Then the green-robed figure of the Dragon Master himself entered!

He came over to the altar and to the other two. The girl shrank back in spite of her obvious efforts to remain calm.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of her. "Did not I order you to remain in your room until ten o'clock?"

"Master, I wanted to be sure of my instructions—"

"You lie. Your punishment will he decided later. Go!"

Obediently she went to the steel door at the opposite side of the room, pulled back the handle on the electrically operated bolt, opened it and disappeared. The green-robed figure turned to Mega.

"You have wired everything according to my instructions?" he demanded.

Flash Mega gave the Dragon Master a hard grin.

"Everything," he said boastfully. "It's a neat job too, pal—I mean Master. I was a pretty good radio man in my punk days. Boy, are a bunch of guys in this town gonna get a surprise tonight!"

The figure in green nodded.

"More than you think," the Dragon Master said coldly. "You disobeyed my orders again by your silly infatuation for one who is a thousand times too good for you." In a movement almost too swift for the eyes to follow, he whipped out an automatic. "You fool—to think I'd let you live now that you're no longer useful to me."

The automatic spouted a snake's tongue lick of flame and Flash Mega's cry of surprise ended in the thud of his body to the concrete floor in front of the altar. But from the curtains over the doorway the Black Bat had stepped through and now his own .38 added its din to the other, deafening in the confines of the room deep under Chinatown. The Dragon Master's gun went spinning from his hand. He started to bend down after it, froze rigidly at the sight of the grim figure who had smashed all his plans.

"I think I've got you this time," the Bat informed him coolly. "I—"

He broke off as a strange tinkling sound came to his ears. It was the sound of a whistle pitched too high for ordinary human ears—the same sort of whistle with which the Black Bat had supplied his own aides. And it was coming from inside that weird dragon mask!

From behind the Black Bat there came a rush of a body, and he wheeled just as Ohmo plunged through the curtains. The Thing took one single glance at the Black Bat as the Dragon Master shrieked orders in Cantonese. Then it sprang through the air straight at the intruder.

The Black Bat's .38s poured a stream of slugs into Ohmo as he ducked aside to avoid that rush, Ohmo, however, grabbed him with one of those iron hands as he fell. A little bubbling sound came through the gorillalike nostrils that told of blood pouring into lungs. Yet as they fell together, the Black Bat trying to get out his second automatic, he knew that unless he worked loose, Ohmo would crush the life from his body, even in dying.

And the pinheaded monstrosity was dying. The Black Bat could hear the strangle in the labored breathing. But the Thing was true to its master to the last. It had been ordered to kill the hooded Nemesis, and those terrible hands were summoning the last of their fading strength to obey.

A HAND with fingers of steel closed over the Black Bat's right bicep and worked up to his neck. He flung himself this way and that, knotting his hard-muscled body as he strove to get out his other gun. At last he got it out, and as that huge hand found his throat, he began pumping bullet after bullet into the monster's naked body. It gave a final strangled sigh and relaxed.

Then the Black Bat was up and looking about him, shoving in fresh clips, wondering why the Dragon Master had not come to his killer monstrosity's aid. But the Dragon Master was gone.

A groan came from Flash Mega. The Black Bat bent over the dying gangster. Flash opened his eyes, looked up at the hooded Nemesis above him, and a faint, ironical grin broke his hard features,

"Joe always said I'd get in trouble on account of a dame," he mumbled, and died.

The Black Bat got out of the building as soon at possible. Where the Dragon Master had gone he had no idea. It was too late to hunt for him now.

He hurried home and went in through the tunnel. Once in the house, he called in the others and told them of what had happened. After that there was nothing to do but wait until I-tso Ling arrived.

She came shortly before ten. The hidden Quinn, watching through a window, saw a car pull up at the curb below.

He focused his glasses on the driver, pulling him up close. The man at the wheel was Colonel Wang.

CHAPTER XIX

Death Flight

VASTLY interested, Silk hurried down and helped the Chinese girl bring up the suitcase containing package after package of bills in the biggest denominations printed. Silk brought the girl into the bedroom where Quinn was tucked under the covers, wearing the cap made of bandage.

"Mr. Quinn?" I-tso inquired in her soft voice, taking the chair Silk offered her. "I've been ordered by the Dragon Master to bring this suitcase to you with a message."

"To me?" he asked weakly. "Why should he send you to a sick man?"

"That I do not know. I only know that had I not obeyed, my father would have paid with his life—as perhaps you know others have paid for disobedience to the Dragon Master's commands. Here is the message I was to deliver to you."

She handed him a note which Silk took from her.

"As you must have been told, Miss Ling, Mr. Quinn is stone blind," said the valet. "Shall I read it to you, sir?"

At Quinn's weak gesture he opened it and read it aloud. The message stated:

> Greetings from the Dragon, Mr. Quinn. Knowing your interest in the cause of justice in spite of the fact that you also have an interest in Eight Incorporated, I know that you will be most eager to offer your humble services to China. You are to take this fund to which you have undoubtedly contributed and deliver it to Mr. Dugro, who has been given some instructions about what to do with the redemption fund. Mr. Dugro is waiting at the airport.
>
> The Dragon has spoken.

"Well, of course I shall do everything possible to cooperate," said Quinn from his bed, "Though I had not expected to be called out of a sick bed. Thank you very much for coming, Miss Ling."

As soon as Silk showed I-tso Ling from the room, Quinn leaped up out of bed and grabbed a pencil and paper. Hastily he printed a few sentences on it and slipped on his Black Bat outfit. Silk already had been told to keep the Chinese girl talking for a few minutes, and so it was that when she started back toward the car she was startled to see the Black Bat appear out of the night and hand her a note.

"Act on this immediately," he told her in a low voice. "Tell him the Black Bat will deliver the money. I'm going to—er—hijack Tony Quinn."

With Butch driving the coupé, the Black Bat presently saw the outlines of Dugro's plane factory buildings shape up. No lights at all showed. An air of gloom permeated the place. The Black Bat ordered the impatient Butch to stop some distance away, announcing that he would go on alone.

"Aw, Boss," pleaded Butch, "can't I just go in there with you and crack somebody's head?"

"Not this trip, Butch."

He took the heavy suitcase and, carrying it easily, went in through the gate and around the corner. The new bomber was sitting on the darkened tarmac, and Walter Dugro was pacing up and down not far away. He was not aware that anyone was near until the Black Bat spoke presentlly.

"Good evening, Mr. Dugro."

Dugro whirled with an exclamation, then saw the Black Bat.

"Whew, you gave me a start, Black Bat! I–I was expecting Tony Quinn."

"I relieved him of the money, quite forcibly, on his way out here," the Black Bat said coolly, "I thought it best to take his place."

"Thank heaven you have it, anyway!" exclaimed the airplane manufacturer. "I received telephoned orders a little while ago to wait here with the ship ready. That was all."

"Right. I have your orders as to how and to whom you will deliver the ransom. If you'll step inside a moment, you can read them."

DUGRO slid back the steel sliding door for them to enter. He opened the note and read it by the light of the match held by the Black Bat.

"Good lord," he breathed.

"Bad news?"

"As far as any hope of thwarting this Dragon Master fellow is concerned."

"Suppose I go with you?"

Dugro pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his sweating face. His hand shook slightly as he returned it to a pocket,

"It will mean my death to disobey orders, Black Bat, but I'd feel a lot safer if you would," he said in unconcealed relief. "Just promise me you'll keep down out of sight when we land."

Dugro showed the Black Bat the note with the instructions. The airplane manufacturer's orders were to fly south to the Silverton Country Club and make a landing on a three-hundred-yard stretch of level turf on the golf course. Here he was to toss out the suitcase, then fly back again.

Donning parachutes, Dugro and the Black Bat went out to the ship. Then they were in the air, climbing up into the black night.

Dugro sat in the left hand seat, the wheel in his expert hands. The Black Bat stood further back on the fuselage.

"You say we're to land on the golf course at Silverton?" the Black Bat asked, above the drone of the motors. "Isn't there danger of a crack-up with no ground lights?"

"I can handle her all right—I think. She lands pretty slow and I've got good landing lights in the wings."

"I suppose this Dragon Master would like nothing better than to know that the Black Bat was aboard," the hooded man suggested, with a dry chuckle. "With him out of the way the head of this sweet racket would have nothing to fear."

Dugro nodded, "That's right. The Black Bat almost spoiled everything for him. He would never be safe as long as the Black Bat was alive."

"Which, I think, is why you were so eager to let me come along," the Black Bat said coolly. "I became certain of that after noticing that your compass is not pointing south."

Dugro whirled in the seat, whipping out his gun with one hand. The plane lurched wildly. But the Black Bat had made a-flying dive forward and grabbed the man who had been masquerading as the Dragon Master, pinioning his arms.

"Quick, Wang!" he yelled over his shoulder. "Come up here and get these controls."

With motors roaring the ship went into a dive while the Black Bat struggled to unsnap Dugro's belt and drag him free of the controls. Leaping from where he had been lying prone behind ballast sandbags, Colonel Wang fell headlong down on top of both men and got into the pilot's seat.

When the Bat had printed that message and given it to I-tso Ling, he had suspected that the bomber might play some part in this intricate extortion scheme, after the money should be delivered to Dugro. The contents of his note to Wang had sent the Chinese racing to the field where Dugro was waiting. When Quinn had drawn Dugro inside the hangar to read the message it had given the waiting Chinese time to hide himself back in the fuselage.

Dugro was fighting now like an insane man.

"I knew I should have shot you the moment you appeared," the airplane man panted. "That's what I was going to do later—then knock myself out after returning the treasure to the, proper people." Somehow he seemed to be taking a keen joy in making this boastful clean breast of things.

"You're not trying to say that you actually intended to return it?" demanded the Black Bat.

DUGRO was subdued now. He lay on the floor of the droning ship as Wang circled and headed back toward the field.

"Yes. It is hidden in some empty motor crates in my factory. It was this way—Belmont didn't know that this bomber is a death-trap should it ever get into a spin with a load. I knew he'd never advance another penny for some corrections necessary in the wing design. In his greed to get that ten million dollar order, he kept pressing me until I was desperate. I also knew Wang was going to find out the truth.

"So I had to stall them both—Wang on the tests, and Belmont. The only way out was to steal the treasure; force them to pay ransom for it, then use the money to have a dummy buyer buy out Belmont's share after telling him the plane was no good. That way I would have got control of my factory again, would have money to redesign the wing, and—" He glared at the Black Bat as he shouted wildly. "And I'd have done it too if it hadn't been for you!"

Wang circled the field at less than five hundred feet and let down the wheels. He brought the ship in for a landing. By now the front of the hangar was lit up, and as they rolled to a stop the Black Bat saw men emerge from it.

Dugro moved then, taking the Black Bat completely by surprise. He wrenched his right hand free and caught the hooded man with a terrific blow along the side of the neck.

The Black Bat's whole lower body went half paralyzed and his legs gave way. He tried to get up as Dugro leaped over him, dived through the fuselage door and broke into a run.

And the Black Bat, trying to drag himself toward the door, saw him go—helpless to do a thing.

Then from the pilot's compartment behind him came the snapping reports of a 9 mm. Luger, Wang shooting through the open window. Dugro stumbled and went down, tried to get up, and lay still as more bullets from the Luger poured into him.

A familiar figure detached itself from the group emerging from the hangar. McGrath! He ran forward, poking his head in the door.

"Well, Black Bat, I knew I'd get you some day," he stated in a matter-of-fact voice to the prostrate figure on the floor of the fuselage, He brought out his handcuffs. "You should have known that. Here—stick 'em out."

A cool voice in broken Engliah cut in then, its owner lining the Luger pistol at McGrath's thick middle.

"So sorry please," said Colonel Wang apologetically. "No take him tonight. Velly good friend of Wang."

CHAPTER XX

Checkmated Again

NOT ten minutes later the Black Bat still sat in the doorway of the plane talking to Chivor, Belmont, Dr. Ling, and McGrath. I-tso Ling, who had come to the airport with Wang, had put in appearance and was up in she pilot's seat with him.

"And so, gentlemen, that's about how it happened," said the Black Bat, finishing the long, detailed account he bad been giving. "Dugro's Asiation Export outfit had been exporting planes to belligcrents from California. He saw trouble brewing and tricked Mr. Belmont into buying him out while he skipped out to China until things quieted down. Later he came back and got Mr. Belmont to back him in this present plant. But the bomber was a failure and Dugro knew it. He had known Duke Kasini in China, and when he heard of the art collection being brought over, he conceived the idea of settling all the troubles by a big coup. He organized the Dragon society merely as a front for his activities."

THE Black Bat looked at Paul Chivor who was with the others.

"I still don't know where you fit into this, Mr. Chivor," the Black Bat said. "Somehow, though I'm convinced you're not such a scoundrel as I was inclined to believe."

"Thank you," replied the pilot. "As a matter of fact, I'm with the Bureau of Narcotics. Before I joined the Bureau I was a pilot. I was flying for California concern—Asiation Export—when word came from my superiors that District Attorney Anthony Quinn of this city had a lead to the fact that Duke Kasini was smuggling in huge quantities of opium from China. We had been after him for years. My new assignment was to go to China and try to ferret him out from that end.

"So to make it look good I stunted a plane, got myself fired, and we arranged to have my regular license revoked. After which I pulled the drinking act and went to China. It took months and months, but I finally traced Kasini's shipments to European ports and finally here on a tanker. We got that last one, but he was too clever to put himself in the open. We laid a trap. I got word to Kasini that his confiscated shipment of drugs was in an old warehouse, hoping he'd try to hijack it. I also contacted Chow Seto's Laundry as a customer, to clinch my evidence,

"We waited and waited at the warehouse for Kasini to make his play. Nearly three weeks. He never seemingly took the bait. Finally, last night, one of our operatives telephoned that the whole mob had been seen near the Chow Seto Laundry—around the hotel next door. We decided to take the gamble of grabbing them off there and convicting them on the evidence we already had. So we raced to the place, only to find it in roaring flames. By the time we got back so the warehouse the mob had struck—a fluke that wouldn't happen again in a hundred years."

"And now we've got them all surrounded down beneath those condemned buildings." Commissioner Warner said grimly. "If they don't come out, we'll get them with tear gas."

"No—no, Commissioner!" the Black Bat shouted and swiftly told how Flash Mega had wired the place with nitro. A startled look came over the commissioner's face as he swung to McGrath.

"Get on the phone and tell them to hold off!" he barked sharply, urgently. "Hurry!"

I-tso Ling moved hastily over to the Black Bat and bent with her lips to his ear. She whispered something in it. He turned to Warner and the others.

"It seems that Miss Ling was informed by the Dragon Master—Dugro—before she went to Quinn's house with the treasure that he had ordered Flash Mega to fix up some kind of devilish contraption that could be exploded when Dugro broadcasted on an unused wave length. I'm also assuming, of course, that after my departure the Dragon Master came back and removed the bodies of Mega and the thug so as not to arouse suspicion on the part of the others when they assembled to be paid off."

McGRATH had disappeared at a clumpty gallop, but shortly reappeared. He came up to Warner and shook his head.

"Too late, Chief. One of those condemned buildings went up about ten minutes ago. It just rose up a bit and then settled back again into a mass of bricks. Headquarters just told me. Firemen are digging in the wreckage for bodies. Dugro musta fixed it for that to happen right after he took off in the plane. He was a clever guy—just clever enough that we'll never know how he managed to almost blow me to kingdom come. And those two poor guys, Fitz and Murphy—"

The Black Bat rose to his feet in the doorway, still wearing the parachute.

"I think I can enlighten you, Captain," he said. "You will recall that after the explosion on Quinn's lawn only the splinters of wood were found by police experts. I also remembered then that Flash Mega was a nitro expert. My suspicions took shape when I found.a strong bow and several arrows in the underground room of Ohmo, the Chinese thug. When the metal arrow head was unscrewed, it revealed a tiny vial of nitro inside, with a nail plunger sticking out through the tip.

"Since an arrow has been fired a distance of several hundred yards it was an easy matter to place one on Quinn's lawn as a warning to Eight Incorporated. The police car was blown to pieces in the same manner. You will receive that peculiar arrow weapon by messenger tomorrow, Captain; along with the pistol shot from the Dragon Master's hand in their underground meeting room tonight."

He took from his pocket the shells he had picked up at the airport the night Dugro had fired at him as he took off with Harrison. Compared with shells fired from Dugro's gun, they would be final, conclusive proof. McGrath took them and shoved them in his own pocket. Automatically he took out a cigar and bit off an end.

"All right, Black Bat, that winds up everything," he said. "All we need to do is have Mr. Belmont and his remaining associates buy the treasure with all this money they'll get back—and maybe buy a new vault door for the museum—and everything is clear. All except between you and me, I don't shoot sitting game. But there's nothing to prevent me hitting the breeze for Tony Quinn's house right now in a police cruiser to do a little settling of my own."

And the doughty officer hurried away. Belmont had taken little part in the conversation. He was too relieved at the return of the money. He looked at the Black Bat now.

"Could I give you a lift to town?" he asked politely.

The Black Bat shook his head, smiling.

"No thank you. But I'm going to ask Colonel Wang to see that I get home. I'm sure he won't mind."

He got inside the plane and closed the door, I-tso Ling translated to Wang in rapid Cantonese. Ignoring her father's gesticulating commands to come with him at once, Wang nodded and spun the starter on the two motors. The speedy bomber roared down the runaway and lifted into the night, The Black Bat directed Wang to fly at less than a thousand feet over a certain section of town. Even the Chinese girl, confused by being in the air, would not know where he landed.

As Wang shut off the motors only short minutes later and the Black Bat braced himself to jump through the door, I-tso Ling did something that was entirely American. She leaned swiftly and pressed her lips to his cheek.

"That is from the future Mrs. Wang in appreciation for saving my husband's 'face,'" she murmured. "Yes, I'm returning with him to China.

When I told my honotable father that I may be apprehended some day as a Dragon, I'm sure he won't object."

Then she said something else that sounded to him like "*Tangtze*."

"I beg your pardon," said the Black Bat.

"It's one way of saying good-bye in Chinese," I-tso Ling told him.

He braced his body against the door, held shut by the force of the slipstream, and tumbled out. A world of darkness rushed up at him He counted five, pulled, and the big chute snapped him upright four hundred feet above the ground. As he landed and hurriedly rolled up the parachute, there came the sound of a distant siren.

LUCKILY the Black Bat had landed within two blocks of his own estate, on a vacant stretch of ground. He dashed for the gatehouse with the chute wadded in his arms, dropped in the tunnel and sped into the house just as Captain McGrath pulled up in front.

"Tony, where have you been?" cried Carol.

"I'll explain later," he said, laughing as he yanked off his clothes that were over his pajamas and jumped into bed.

"Here—give me that bandage, and get rid of those garments. "McGrath's outside."

The big officer came barging in. Carol barely had time to open the bedroom door, before he pushed past her and stopped short at the sight of Quinn's bandaged head.

"Well, I'll be—be—dammit to hell!" said Captain McGrath in most unofficerlike fashion.

Tony Quinn looked up at him with his dead eyes and inquired in a weak voice:

"Is that you, McGrath? Did you catch the Dragon Master?"

"You know blamed well I did, but that I didn't get the Black Bat!" yelled back the disgruntled McGrath.

"I rather got that impression from the way you came charging in here. I believe that means you won a bet from me in saying that the Black Bat would show up in the Dragon case. But you also lost one by not capturing him. So I gather that we're even?"

"Don't worry—we'll meet again," was the reply as the disgusted Captain McGrath headed for the door. "I'll get you one of these deys. So long!"

"*Tängtze*," Tony Quinn said coolly.

"Huh?" demanded McGrath suspiciously, abruptly, turning in the doorway.

"It's one way of saying good-by in Chinese," Quinn informed him laconically.

"Bah!" snapped Captain McGrath, slamming the front door as he went out.

THE END

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